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JESUS TODAY

S. Kappen

JESUS AND MAN

Kurien Kunnum puram

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS TODAY

George Soares Prabhu

GOD IS MET IN THE ORDINARY

Hildegard Sina

JESUS MEANS TRUTH - THAT SETS MEN FREE

X. Irudayara j

THE PRICE HE PAID

Samuel Rayan

A CORRECTION

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The Living Christ

JESUS TODAY

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Editorial

Jesus Christ yesterday, today, and the same for ever. That however does not mean that he ignores our history and our pilgrimage, our growth and decay, the new things we create, the fresh questions we pose, the unheard of ways in which we mess up our world, and strive and suffer and hope. Jesus is still active in our life, and responds to life's changing needs and vicissitudes. His sameness is not stagnation, but fidelity to us and our changing life. He is wholly dependable. It is his reliability that is the same for ever, not his approaches and answers, because these have to be faithful to our history which is evolving and always in a state of flux.

The Jesus of today is no carbon copy of the Jesus of yesterday. Once he lived on our earth, and learned, and grew in stature and wisdom and favour with God and men. He still grows in and with us who are called to fill up what is wanting in the struggle to the stature of Jesus so that in the end the total Christ may appear in full ripeness, he having his bodily completion in us, with our coming together to a head in him.

The articles in this number of *Jeevadhara* are a preliminary attempt to spell out some of the implications of our faith that the Risen Lord is with us today and tomorrow as we build our life through daily tasks and struggles, through decisions of some consequences and of none, through simple relationships which warm the heart. S. Kappen's article tries to explain the basic position and provide a frame of reference for the other studies. The reader who feels challenged by some of the things said will be glad of the stimulation and of the invitation to probe deeper into the matter. Kurian Kunnumpuram applies the thought of Jesus' presence in and through our life to the central concern of God, namely man. George Soares Prabhu interprets

the miracles of Jesus so that they become intelligible and religiously meaningful for us today. A new concrete way of doing theology and experiencing a touch of the Lord in our daily life is offered to us in Hildegard Sina's contribution. The living truth of Jesus, making possible a life of freedom in the Indian scene, is the substance of Irudayaraj's study. The concluding article reflects on the art of God's being with, and for men, and of man's being with God for men. Human wholeness is not cheap because man is not cheap. Man is a precious pearl for which God in Christ risked everything. Shall we in Christ also not risk everything for man?

Vidya Jyoti
Delhi

Samuel Rayan

Jesus Today

Our age is marked by a profound concern for the future. Envisaging the future, planning for it, projecting alternatives – these have become matters of absorbing interest. Not merely interpreting history, but creating it, occupies the minds of men. Paradoxically, this concern for the future has generated its opposite, namely, a concern for the past, a tendency to return to the origins. In philosophy this tendency has found expression in the slogan “Back to things themselves”, i.e. back to the world of our original experience, the matrix of all truth. This trend is also observable among the Marxists, especially of the West, who are trying today to return to the early writings of Marx. This can also be noticed among the adherents of various religions: Hindus today are striving to recapture the original insights of the rishis and seers of old. Christianity is no exception. Luther’s was the first attempt to free faith from the accumulated traditions of the past and to root it directly in the message of the Gospel. In our own times Catholics are returning to the New Testament writings, to drink there from the clear spring of the earliest traditions. This trend has of late become further radicalized in so far as the aim is to get behind the Gospels to the original phenomenon of the historical Jesus and his teaching.

Why this tendency especially at a juncture when our primary concern is with the future? It can only be because it has dawned on us that we cannot leap into the unknown future unless our feet are solidly planted in what is perennially valid in the past. Implied is also the recognition that for us today the origins of historical movements are more relevant than their subsequent developments and accretions. This means further that the history of ideas and movements has not been one only of progressive clarification but also of self-alienation and deviation. This is true even of contemporary Marxism which has developed along lines which Marx would never have approved of. The deviation had in fact set in even during his life time, as is clear from a letter he wrote to a friend, in which he pleaded not to be called a Marxist and disclaimed being one. A process of alienation can

be discerned also in the history of Christian faith. Would not Jesus of Nazareth, if he were to come in our midst once again, disown much of what today is being done in his name by Christians?

1. Jesus bound

The alienation of Christian faith and practice from the historical Jesus took place along three principal lines – cultic, dogmatic and institutional. For an adequate grasp of this process it is necessary to go back to the very sources of Christianity and from there trace its development right up to our own day. This is not possible within the limited scope of this article. What is attempted here is nothing more than a schematic and, admittedly, a simplified outline of the salient features which even a cursory study will reveal.

Cultic alienation was the first to set in. The historical Jesus devalued cult by subordinating it to justice, mercy and love. He did not project himself as an object of worship. He did not institute any rite which may be called cultic in the traditional sense of the term. What we call the Eucharist today was originally a prophetic gesture which looked forward to the end of present history when God would invite his children to sit at table with him. But no sooner had Jesus died than there developed a cult centred upon him. However, the focal point of this cult was not the Jesus of history but the Jesus risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father. The Jesus who was part of our history was replaced in Christian piety by the risen Christ who is thought of as above history, as eternal and immutable. The same piety removed him from our midst, from the common run of every day life, and installed him in the tabernacle. It built a separate home for him furnished with flowers, candles, holy water, incense and the like. It projected him as a stickler for ritual purity, who avoided publicans and sinners and looked down upon the 'profane' world of everyday life. Cult also started a process of abstraction. The death of Jesus was dissociated from his historical life or reduced to a mere pre-requisite for resurrection. Jesus was further fragmented into many formal aspects, each of which in its turn became the object of a new 'devotion'. Thus we had a plethora of devotions having for their

objects, 'The Precious Blood' 'The Crown of Thorns' 'The Five Wounds' 'The Sacred Heart' etc. By the Middle Ages Christianity had become a cult-centred religion. Mercy, justice and love took second place to the Eucharistic cult and the devotions. The circle was complete. A non-cultic prophetic movement ended up as a cultic religion.

The history of dogma and catechesis shows a parallel process of alienation. Jesus as pictured in the Synoptic Gospels is a man among men, a member of the family of man. He was less word made flesh than flesh become word, matter endowed with a tongue. Flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, bone of our bones, he learned to love in being loved by others, and gained knowledge of himself in being acknowledged by others. It is in meeting his kind that he learned kindness and compassion. He loved man. He struck roots in others to such an extent that all this became a need for him especially in moments of crisis. Exquisitely attuned to everything human, he valued the friendship of women; he loved children, wine and flowers. He could rejoice with those who rejoiced, and weep with those who wept.

Like any man he too had to grow in wisdom and in favour with God and man. He was a quester after truth: after the God who made him; and he found Him on the banks of Jordan. On the day of his baptism at the hands of John the Baptizer he was taken hold of by God. He was swept off his feet, uprooted from his familiar world and transplanted into the realm of the divine. There he was given a new mind and a new heart, and he began to see the world in a new light, in the light of the reign of God. But his search did not end there. He had still to come to terms with God and reach a point of clarity regarding his mission in life. The consequent inner struggle with light and darkness is represented in the Gospels as the temptation in the desert.

Jesus was also fully conscious of his limitations. Asked about the final coming of the Kingdom, he replied, "But about that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son, only the Father" (Mk 13:32). So too he admitted openly that he could not dispense the blessings of the age to come just as he liked. The sons of Zebedee who

sought from him the favour of being allowed to sit in state one on his right, the other on his left, were told bluntly that to sit on his right or left was not for him to grant, such privileges were for those to whom it had already been assigned (Mk 10:40). Though the divine in him radiated its power, he did not think of snatching at equality with God (Phil 2:6). When a stranger called him 'good master' his answer was: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mk 10:17-18).

Like any man he too was subject to varying and conflicting emotions. The woes he uttered against the hypocrites of his day betray a spirit that was quick to flame with indignation. He was filled with anger at the sight of the trafficking that went on in the temple, the house of his Father. The destiny he was to meet in Jerusalem set every fibre of his being in tension. "I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until the ordeal is over." (Lk 12: 50) The prospect of death was to him a source of infinite sadness which he tried to share with his friends: "My heart is ready to break with grief." (Mk 14: 34) It filled him with fear and anguish. To quote the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews: "In the days of his earthly life, he offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to God who was able to deliver him from the grave" (Heb 5: 7).

What a far cry from this Jesus, who is so much like us and in his very likeness stands out as the wholly 'other', to the Christ of dogma! The latter is Jesus transmuted as he was made to pass through the Graeco-Roman mould of thinking. He came out of this mould fragmented into abstractions like person, nature, hypostasis, body, soul, substance, quality, quantity, essence and existence. What cult did at the level of action, theology did at the level of thinking. Jesus was reduced to a mere sum of formal concepts. Seen from the human side he is a man with two natures subsisting in one divine person. Seen from the divine side he is the second person of the Trinity identical in nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Controversies raged as to whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father only or from the Father and the Son. What is worse, in this process of sterile philosophical reflection the humanity of Jesus was downgraded. Of course dogma as well as theology affirmed his human nature but not

without denying him the status of a human person, a mode of reasoning which sounds so odd to us. This had its repercussion in popular catechesis. For the mass of believers Jesus appeared as God under the guise of man. In their eyes he did not really grow in wisdom, for being God, he knew from early infancy all there is to know. Though they recited the official creed which said that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, they assumed well enough that he could not have really suffered, endowed as he was on earth with the [beatifying vision of God. If ever they read the Gospels they slurred over the passages which affirmed the human condition of Jesus or, if they were clever enough, managed to put dishonest interpretations on them. In short, if cult segregated Jesus from the company of man and settled him down in churches on the fringe of the real world, dogma banished him to the world of ideas. In the process the real Jesus of history became a forgotten person.

No less than cult and catechesis institutionalism distorted the image and the teachings of Jesus. The Gospels picture him as one who right from the outset of his public life rejected power, whether economic or political, as a means to usher in a New Age. The historical movement he set in motion was supposed to be for the poorer classes in Palestine and the Graeco-Roman world who had no political ambitions. But with the Emperor Constantine, who declared Christianity the state religion, the leaders of the Christian community began to enjoy economic and political privileges. The temptation Jesus overcame in the desert his disciples succumbed to, all too easily. The Church began to exercise control over every sphere of life. This led to a proliferation of institutions. Though in course of time political life regained its autonomy, the Church held on to its institutions, its schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages, and even started new ones. Every local church today has its institutional empire. What is still more saddening is that most of these institutions have not even an umbilical bond with the Gospel of Jesus. By and large they embody the values of capitalism – private interest, competition, aggression, and lust for power. Besides, in so far as they violate the legitimate autonomy of secular spheres of life, they have become many instruments of domination. Thus by a curious development the ‘good news’ of liberation preached by Jesus gave

rise to structures of unfreedom. Institutionalism has in this manner disfigured the image of Jesus and neutralized the revolutionary, disruptive force of his teaching.

The tragic consequence is that he is the most forgotten person among the very people who claim to be his disciples. He lies buried under the weight of accumulated layers of rituals, rubrics, laws, concepts, legends, myths, superstitions and institutions. He lies bound hand and foot by innumerable cords that tradition has cast around him. His voice is smothered, his spirit is stifled. If he still acts and makes his presence felt in history, it is less through the official church than through honest dissenters among Christians.

It is the duty of all who cherish the vision and hope of Jesus to set him free from the prison house of cult, dogma and institutionalism so that he can freely go about pointing, as of old, his accusing finger at the Scribes, Pharisees, elders, priests and Herods of today. To this end it is necessary to remove the many veils which historically conditioned faith and tradition have put on him, and let his visage shine forth in its original splendour, and his words ring out in their untamed incisiveness.

What we have said thus far should not be interpreted to mean that the history of Christianity until now has been one only of progressive alienation. Admittedly the development of Christian theory and practice in the West contains also positive elements in harmony with the teachings of Jesus. These have to be clearly distinguished from others at variance with them. A critical study of this question may be useful, and even necessary, up to a point, but should never be made an absolute for people who do not share the Western tradition. If we Indians have no other way to meet God as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus than by mentally reenacting the history of Western Christianity we are, of all men, the most to be pitied!

It is necessary to go back to the historical Jesus. But is not the attempt doomed to fail, if the Gospels are not historical documents in the usual sense of the term but the expression of the faith of the early Christians? This is a serious problem of which an adequate discussion, though necessary, is not possible

here. This much, however, may be said. It is true that the nature of our sources render futile any attempt to write a biography or to describe the psychology of Jesus. It is impossible to reconstruct the sequence of events in his life. But to go further and say that no understanding of the historical Jesus at all is possible is unwarranted. The Gospels are the concrete embodiment of the response of the early Christians to a *historical* reality, namely, to the life, words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. Hence it is possible for us to have a real encounter with the historical Jesus in and through the Gospels. Using the criteria provided by contemporary Biblical criticism we can arrive at an adequate grasp of the person and teaching of Jesus which are themselves events in history, and perhaps also, of a very broad outline of his life. Nothing more is presupposed here.

However, this is no plea for rediscovering the historical Jesus in order to mimic him or to repeat his teachings parrotwise. For he was a product of his culture, and his thinking bears the mark of the world that bore him. Both his message and the language in which it is couched need to be brought up to date in order that they may be relevant for us.

2. Jesus beyond Jesus

To appreciate fully the need for such a reinterpretation a preliminary reflection, of a general nature, on the dialectics of change affecting ideas and beliefs may be useful. No man thinks in a vacuum nor is he born into the world with innate ideas. He finds himself inserted right from the dawn of consciousness into a society with its own specific system of ideas, values, norms, and goals. These he assimilates from early childhood as mediated by the institutions of society like the family, school, and temple. He internalizes the ideas and beliefs currently held by the people at large. What was objective thus becomes subjective and influences his attitudes and decisions.

But the ideas and beliefs of a people at any given time are intimately interwoven with everyday practical life – with the prevalent mode of production, the structures and institutions of society, the political organization, and cultural activity. Ideas influence the social base and are in turn influenced by it. In

other words they mutually condition one another. In normal times there is a certain equilibrium between ideas and their social base. Crises, however, may develop during which this equilibrium is disturbed and society is thrown off its balance. This may happen in two ways. The first is when ideas change without any corresponding change in the social base. It happens when a people assimilate new ideas either from outside sources or from an internal *élite*. In such conditions one begins to question the value of the existing social structures and institutions. The other mode in which a crisis develops is when the social base undergoes radical change without a corresponding change at the level of ideas. In such a situation what is called into question is the relevance of traditional ideas. In either case society is in birth pang bringing forth a new truth. It is in periods of crisis that exceptional individuals arise who play a prophetic-creative role. They give articulate expression to the revolt against the past and the longing for the new, which exists inarticulate and confused among the masses. In the tensions maturing in the heart of society they discover the call of God. The masses on their part love and hate the new, at the same time. The burden of the past makes them welcome the new, but the fear of the new drives them to conform to the past. The same ambivalence is found also in their attitude to the prophets in their midst, these being heralds of the new. They slay the prophets, and then hasten to erect monuments to the memory of the slain!

The prophets who rise up in periods of crisis are essentially heralds of the future. They are men who dream new dreams and see new visions. Their destiny is to leap into the unknown future and carry the masses with them. They are gripped by an ultimate concern, and their message necessarily has something of the unconditioned. Both in their revolt against the *status quo* and in their commitment to the 'not-yet' there is much that is valid for men of all times. All the same in the very breakthrough they achieve at the level of a total vision of man, they remain conditioned by the *status quo* they revolt against. The new they can envisage only in the language of the old. The very content of their message exhibits this tension between the 'not-yet' and the 'already', between the absolute and the relative, between the perennially valid and the historically conditioned.

Lonely in the sweep of their vision and in the passion of their commitment, they remain very much men of their age.

Jesus of Nazareth was one such prophet, transcendent in his vision, immanent in his world, perennial in his appeal, rooted in his age, absolute in his demands, yet conditioned by his environment. The universal in his message comes to us cast in a cultural mould we have long left behind. This poses a two-fold challenge to us: We have first to ascertain in the teachings of Jesus the perennially valid aspects as distinguished from their historical conditioning. Next we have to bring to light their deeper implications for the man of today and clothe them in our idiom. To do this is to set free the spirit and thought of Jesus from their original mould and thereby release their revolutionary energies for the creation of a better world. This is to allow Jesus to respond to our historical situation in our patterns of thought and speech. Only then can the Jesus of yesterday be a creative force in the world of today and tomorrow.

But in trying to re-interpret Jesus for the men of today are we not committing the same mistake as the early and subsequent generations of Christians? Are we not distorting his image to suit our tastes and safeguard our interests? That there is such a danger cannot be denied. And the only way to avoid it is to see to it that our interpretation is not naive but critical. But what are the criteria that should guide such criticism? They are twofold: fidelity to the original Jesus-phenomenon and responsiveness to the God who reveals himself to us in history. The Christians of the first centuries could not have applied the first criterion, for they lived in an age in which the boundary between myth and reality was blurred. Reality tended to be mythicized, and myth, to be looked upon as history. Consequently, it was natural for the early Christians to raise Jesus to the status of a mythical person. Criticism in our sense of the term was therefore not possible to them. Our situation is quite different. We have gone beyond the stage of myth. We also know that any valid interpretation has to be in the nature of a response to historical phenomena as we encounter them. This obliges us at every stage to subject our subjective prejudices and preferences also to criticism lest they colour our interpretation of reality.

As for the second criterion, in the message of Jesus there is an absolute and a relative dimension. The absolute dimension can be explained only on the basis of his encounter with the Absolute, with God. But precisely because this encounter was enfleshed in a historical situation, it is possible and even natural that the total significance of it overflowed the limits of what was explicitly perceived by Jesus himself. This is in fact true of all aesthetic and religious encounters with truth. That is why the truth of a work of art is often perceived more fully by the viewer than by the artist himself. Similarly it is only subsequent generations that understand the total meaning of a great thinker or a religious genius. However, any further interpretation has to be in line with the fundamental thrust and implicit dynamism of the original datum. Now the fundamental dynamism of Jesus' message pointed to God working in history. If our reinterpretation of Jesus is to be authentic, it is essential that we encounter in history the same God whom he encountered two thousand years ago. It is our responsiveness to the God of today that guarantees our fidelity to the original Jesus-phenomenon. The demands which God in history makes on us today help us understand the deeper meaning of the teaching of Jesus. Conversely, the demands of Jesus help us interpret the signs of the times and decipher the divine challenges inscribed in history. In this way the Jesus of history enters into dialogue, in and through us, with the God of today.

However, the encounter with God is not to be understood solely in a mystical, or esoteric sense. Any man gripped by an absolute concern for his fellowmen has encountered God. It is possible, even likely, that the extreme radicals who are in prison today for the sole crime of having opposed an unjust society had a more authentic encounter with God than many professedly religious men and women who devote themselves to prayer and penance. For the same reason the former may understand the significance of Jesus much better than the latter.

If we retrace our steps to Jesus of Nazareth it is not to pitch our tent with him in the past but to go beyond him. We go beyond him when we free him from the historical conditioning of the Judaism of the first century, re-interpret his message in

the context of our contemporary concerns, and translate it into today's language. Put differently, we can make it possible for Jesus to go beyond himself and discover his true identity in our age. He can slough off the past in order to come alive in the present, with whatever in his past has an abiding value. Thus we raise him from the dead and give him a new name and habitation. Seen in this light, the resurrection of Jesus is a continuing process achieved through our re-interpretation of his message and our commitment in response to it.

A re-interpretation of the entire message of Jesus along the lines indicated is an urgent need of our times. This, however, is beyond the scope of this article. No more can be done here than to illustrate, by way of conclusion, the approach set out here with a few reflections on the kingdom of God which is central to the preaching of Jesus.

He believed that God would come to free man from every kind of bondage and usher in a new age of justice, freedom, love and universal brotherhood. His concern for the ultimate future is of supreme relevance for us today and will be so for men of all ages. But to be fully operative it has to be stripped of its historical conditioning. One form of conditioning concerns the belief in the imminence of the kingdom which most scholars attribute to Jesus. If he entertained such a belief it might possibly have been under the influence of the apocalyptic literature of his days, which found a favourable soil in frustrated nationalism. Be that as it may, for us today, the horizon of ultimate fulfilment has receded into the unknown future, a future handed over to the mysterious working out of two freedoms—the freedom of man and the freedom of God. However, belief in the imminence of the kingdom brings out a truth that is valid for all times, namely, that the ultimate destiny of man will be settled by his decision here and now. In this sense God and his kingdom are always imminent.

Historical conditioning can be traced also in Jesus' conception of the manner in which the reign of God comes into being. Though he called for human response in the form of repentance, faith and love, the stress is, perhaps unduly, on the

character of the kingdom as a gift of God. Nowhere does Jesus explicitly call upon his hearers to collaborate with God in constructing the kingdom. All that he demands is that they dispose themselves inwardly for it and pray for its coming. Should this attitude be normative for his disciples today? Probably not, for he lived in a pre-scientific age when the conditions which make it possible for man to envision and create the future did not exist. Hence he could not have realized fully the role of man in bringing about the reign of God. In this scientific age we are in a better position to understand that the future of mankind depends on our freedom as much as on God's. We know that God's gift comes to us not as something ready-made but as a call addressed to us to create the future, which when responded to, brings freedom and creativity to fulfilment. Therefore, when we today call upon men to commit themselves to the creation of a new Heaven and new Earth we are, in a sense, going beyond Jesus, but going beyond him in the spirit of creative fidelity to him.

It is along these lines that we have to re-interpret his response to the challenge of the Kingdom which, in more than one respect, will be found embarrassing by contemporary radicals. For Jesus did not condemn slavery though he knew of its existence among the Jews. Though there was, in his time, accumulation of wealth in the privileged classes, on the one hand, and unemployment and poverty, on the other, he did not call for any economic revolution. Nor did he join the nationalist liberation movement led by the zealots. From all this it has been argued, by many Christians, that revolutionary commitment of any sort is opposed to the Gospel. They err because they set up a historically conditioned attitude of Jesus as normative for all ages. Jesus who lived two thousand years ago could not have envisaged a social revolution, since its socio-economic and cultural pre-conditions did not exist. As for political liberation his non-involvement probably resulted from his own reading of the times and from his understanding of the divine challenge as revealed at that particular juncture of history. But this is no justification for social conformism today. On the contrary, the basic thrust of his message demands radical commitment where the social system is unjust and oppressive, as in India. One cannot believe in the reign of God as the total liberation of man

from every kind of bondage, a liberation to be brought about by human initiative, and at the same time remain neutral to structures of oppression. Similarly, Jesus' affirmation of the primacy of man over the Sabbath can in no way be reconciled with perpetuating the domination of man by structures. When, therefore, Christians commit themselves to social revolution today they are not going against, but along with Jesus. It is through them, only through them, that Jesus comes alive in the twentieth century.

Madras

S. Kappen

Jesus and Man

Introduction

Jesus was no philosopher. He did not elaborate a systematic view of man. He never took the trouble clearly to spell out his understanding of man or his attitude to him. Still, implicit in his words and actions was an unmistakable interest in man, a genuine concern for his well-being and happiness. Jesus was a great lover of man. His life and teaching bear witness to his undying faith in the human person. They reveal his deep conviction that man has immense potentialities for growth. Jesus seems to have advocated radical changes in human relationships. Apparently he believed that human beings can live together in love, care for one another, and thus build true communities that promote everyone's welfare.

These are some of the ideas reflected on in this article. Our interest is not primarily historical. We shall not discuss the difficult problem of whether the words and actions attributed to

Jesus in the Gospels do in fact go back to the historical Jesus. It is with the Jesus of the Gospels and his attitude to man that we shall be mainly concerned. However, we have to ask ourselves: What relevance has it for our situation in India today?

Jesus was for man

After Dietrich Bonhoeffer it is quite fashionable to speak of Jesus as a man for others. Actually the idea is not new. Christian tradition has always believed that "for us men and for our salvation he came down, became man, died and rose, went up and will come again"¹. And the Gospels bear out the truth of this traditional interpretation. For Jesus man is the most precious being on the face of the earth, and man's welfare is his chief concern.

His mission, he declared, was to bring the fulness of life to every man (cf. Jn. 10:10). But he knew that there were many things that prevented man's growth and development. Man was enslaved by sin and selfishness. He was under the dominion of the devil and the powers of nature. He was subject to hunger, disease and death. Jesus wanted to free man from them all. The main thrust of his mission was to liberate man from all forms of slavery and oppression (cf. Lk. 4:16-21). His miracles too were part of this work (cf. Mt. 11:2-6; 12:28). They effectively manifested his intention of healing man in every dimension of his existence. The wholeness of man is what he sought to promote. For this he was prepared to give his very life (cf. Mk. 10:45).

The 'good news' he proclaimed was centred on human beings. He sought to convince us that the heavenly Father loves us very much (cf. Lk. 12:32). We are precious to him, more precious than the lilies of the field and the birds of the air (cf. Lk. 6:22-33). God who takes care of the sparrows has a special concern for us men because to him we are worth much more than many of them (cf. Lk. 12:6 f.)

That is why Jesus subordinated everything else to the welfare of man. He violated the law of the Sabbath, the highest

1. cf. the Symbol of Nicaea.

religious law of the Jews, in order to heal people who were not at all in danger of death (cf. Lk. 6:6-10; 13:10-17; 14:1-6). He did not think it necessary to postpone these miracles even for a day. Because of a religious law he would not leave a man in suffering. "In his view sabbath is for man; sabbath and sacrifice, temple and altar, priests and hierarchies, churches, institutions, laws, liturgies, traditions, definitions, creeds and cultures are all for man, and the community of men and the wholeness of all"².

The call to greatness

Jesus had enormous faith in man, in his ability to be great. "No teacher had ever a higher view of man than Jesus had. That is proved by his entire method of approach. No one ever flung such commands at men; no one ever launched such challenges at men; no one ever confronted men with such invitations."³ Jesus asked man to give up all his wealth in order to be free to pursue his destiny (cf. Mk. 10:21). He challenged him to hate his father, mother and close relatives (cf. Lk. 14:6). He invited him to take up his cross and be ready to lose his very life (cf. Mk. 10:37). He demanded of man a readiness to give without ever counting the cost. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well. Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again." (Lk. 6:27-30) To his mind, nothing short of the supreme perfection of God can serve as a model for man (cf. Mt. 5:48).

These commands, challenges and invitations show that Jesus was quite confident that man can rise to the heights of greatness to which he is summoned. This does not mean that Jesus would subscribe to the naive and dangerous optimism which believes that there will be constant progress, that man will become ever better. He was aware of the dark side of human

2. S. Rayan, "The Underlying Philosophy of Jesus Christ" in *The Rally* (Dec. 1974 - Jan. 1975) p. 5.

3. W. Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus*, p. 128.

history and the depth of degradation to which man can sink. Jesus spoke of "this wicked generation". He knew that sin originated in the heart of man (cf. Mk. 7:21 ff). and that man was not, in his present state, totally reliable (cf. Jn. 2:23-25). That is why he was concerned with healing man at the roots of his being.

The challenge of the forgiveness of sins

After a careful examination of the teaching of Jesus. Norman Perrin, came to the conclusion: "The central feature of the message of Jesus is, then, the challenge of the forgiveness of sins and the offer of the possibility of a new kind of relationship with God and with one's fellowman".⁴ In Mark's Gospel Jesus begins his ministry with the proclamation of the advent of God's kingdom and a call to repentance (1:15). God's kindly activity is primarily seen in the forgiveness of sin. That this belongs to the core of the 'good news' Jesus preached is borne out by the central petition in the Lord's Prayer and a significant group of parables. Most remarkable among them probably are the three parables Luke has gathered together in Chapter 15, those of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son. In these parables Jesus stresses God's eagerness to forgive repentant sinners. He goes to the extent of saying that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk. 15:7).

Jesus was not satisfied with merely proclaiming the forgiveness of sins in words. He lived it out in his life. His table-fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners is regarded as an 'acted parable' which brought home to people the consoling message of God's offer of forgiving love even to the outcastes of society. Jesus not only associated himself closely with the outcastes but also held table-fellowship with them.⁵ There is reason to believe

4. N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, p. 107. I am indebted to this book for some of the ideas in this section.
5. In the Gospels there are remarkably few references to the table-fellowship. cf. Lk 15:2; Mt 11:16-19; 8:11. Still Perrin believes that the table-fellowship is "the aspect of Jesus' ministry which must have been most meaningful to his followers and most offensive to his critics." *Ibid.*, p. 102.

that some of his sayings are best understood in this context. Probably the Lord's Prayer also belongs there.

God's offer of forgiveness is not only a gift. It is a challenge as well. It demands that we in our turn learn to forgive. The appropriate response to one's experience of God's forgiveness is to forgive one's fellowmen. This is expressly taught in the Lord's Prayer (cf. Mt. 6: 12, 14 f.). It is also brought out in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt 18; 23-35). The message of the parable is clear: you have been forgiven, so you must forgive others.

Revolution of love

Usually we believe that the basic human response to God's offer of love is a return of love to God. But Jesus seems to have thought differently. He laid stress on love for one's fellowman rather than on love for God.

He rarely spoke about love for God.⁶ When he was asked to name the most important commandment he found it difficult to do so (cf. Mk 12: 28-34). Apparently he could not bring himself to say that the commandment to love God was the greatest and leave it at that. He had to mention love for one's fellowmen as being of equal importance. To the rich young man who requested to be shown the way of eternal life Jesus pointed out only those commandments that have a bearing on our relationship to other human beings (cf. Mt. 19: 16-19). While emphasizing the truth that it is not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of his heart, Jesus gave a catalogue of actions and attitudes that defile him. Only sins

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6. H. Braun has called attention to an interesting phenomenon. In the Synoptic Gospels *love for God* is used substantively only once, in Lk 11: 42. Even this is problematic since the parallel Mt 23:23 does not speak of love of God but only of mercy and fidelity to one's fellowmen. *To love God*, used as a verb, is found in Mk 12: 28-34 and parallels. That is all we find in the first three Gospels about love for God. cf. *Jesus* p. 162.

against one's fellowmen are listed there (cf. Mk. 7: 20-23; Mt. 15:10). All this gives one the impression that Jesus was primarily interested in our love for our fellow human beings.

This impression is strengthened by two parables. First there is the parable of the Good Samaritan in which a nameless stranger is held up as a model for neighbourly love because he came to the aid of a human being in need (Lk. 10: 30-37). Significantly there is no mention here of God, no reference to a service done out of love for God, no preoccupation with the reward that can be gained by the good deed.⁷ Secondly, we have the description of the Last Judgement (Mt. 25: 31-46). In it we are told that the one criterion for the final evaluation of the success or failure of our lives is the love and service of our fellowmen. For quite a long time I used to think that I had to see Christ in the poor and the needy and serve him. But gradually it has dawned on me that neither those who were blessed nor those who were condemned were aware of the fact that they were serving or refusing to serve Jesus in the hungry and the sick.

It comes home to us that Jesus started a movement of love. He brought the message of the Father's love for us and embodied it in his very person. By loving us he enabled us to love others. The new commandment which he has given us is to love our fellowmen as he has loved us (cf. Jn. 15: 12-14). "The love that comes from God, with all the blessings in which it is embodied, is made to reach out from man to man instead of dutifully returning to God. A new evaluation of man is being disclosed, and a new pattern of human existence in community is being shaped".⁸ That this is not just a modern misinterpretation of the mind of Jesus is clear from 1 Jn. 2: 16: "By this we know love, that he laid down his Life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren". It is remarkable that we are not asked to lay down our lives for Jesus who died for us.

7. cf. R. Schnackenburg, "Humanität und Heil der Menschen" in F. Henrich (edit.) *Humanismus zwischen Christentum et Marxismus*, pp. 119-143, esp. pp. 123-124.

8. S. Rayan, *loc. cit* p. 6.

Towards a new society

From what has been said so far it is clear that Jesus had a deep understanding of man and a positive attitude to him. He was genuinely interested in man and concerned about his welfare. But then, Jesus lived about two thousand years ago. His ideas and attitudes were shaped by a culture quite different from our own. His view of man must have been time-bound and culturally conditioned. What relevance has it for us today?

While Jesus, in many ways, belonged to his time and was a product of a particular culture, his appreciation of man is of tremendous significance for us in India today. He believed that man was the most precious being on the face of the earth. He maintained that everything else was to be subordinated to his growth and development, his well-being and happiness. What we find in our country today, and also in the world at large, is that people pay lip-service to the dignity of the human person. They enshrine it in the Constitution in the form of fundamental rights. In reality, however, man is largely a victim of social pressure, economic exploitation and political manipulation. Millions of our fellow men live in abysmal poverty. They are perpetually condemned to hunger and disease, decay and death. All this is utterly dehumanizing. Equally dehumanizing are the injustice and oppression that human beings are subjected to in the name of caste and colour, language, community and political affiliations. It is here that we need to listen to the voice of Jesus challenging us to champion the cause of man.

He has left us some guide-lines for the reconstruction of society. It is true that he had no blue-print for the transformation of social structures. Though he condemned the abuses of the religious leaders of his time, he hardly ever said anything against the political authorities. He did not protest against slavery, the greatest social evil of the time. All the same, he advocated radical changes in human relationships. He stood for the primacy of love. No one, not even the enemy, was to be excluded. He demanded that we give up all revenge. Jesus was against all forms of injustice and oppression. He asked us not to discriminate against the outcastes and the disinherited of

society. He commanded us not to seek personal gain, or be slaves of the profit-motive. Instead, he wanted us to give, and give without ever counting the cost (cf. Lk. 6: 27-30). He pointed out that power and authority was not for domination, but for service, for fostering the growth of others. He asked us to be ever ready to forgive, to be promoters of peace and reconciliation. These values which he cherished can perhaps form the basis of a new society.

Here a comment on Jayaprakash Narayan's movement that is attracting so much attention, at the moment, is not out of place. Even if the motives of some of his present allies are questionable and their integrity doubtful, his basic position is quite commendable. Inspired by Gandhiji's ideas, he has strongly advocated the people's power as against that of the State. He is deeply concerned that people should be masters of their destiny, and not mere playthings in the hands of the State.⁹ This is something which would have appealed to Jesus of Nazareth.

A sign of hope:

Jesus meant the Church to be a sign of hope for mankind. He wanted it to be a community of love where the human person is respected, true brotherhood is fostered, and forgiveness and reconciliation are effected. He hoped and prayed that there would be true unity in the Church, one that embraces and enhances all diversity. He dreamed that it would be basically a fellowship of equals in which authority would not degenerate into tyranny, and obedience into slavery. He did not, of course, desire an inward-looking community, concerned only about its own welfare. He expected the Church to be deeply committed to the service of mankind. He wanted her to demonstrate to the world that true love is possible for naturally selfish human beings, who can build genuine communities that promote the well-being and happiness of all. In short, Jesus meant the Church to be a contemporary realization of the values which he cherished and for which he gave his life.

This is perhaps the challenge which he throws out to his followers in India today.

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9. In two booklets *From Socialism to Sarvodaya and Swaraj for People*, J. P. has spelt out his ideas on the people's power.

The Miracles of Jesus Today

Compared to the miracles of well-known wonder-workers, from Apollonius of Tyana in the first century¹ to Satya Sai Baba in the twentieth,² or even to those attributed to the child Jesus by the apocryphal Gospels, like the 2nd century Infancy Gospel of Thomas, or the 4th century Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew³, the miracles of Jesus reported in the canonical Gospels are conspicuous for their sobriety, altruism and restraint. Jesus performs no spectacular stunts to impress the crowds, gives no frivolous exhibitions of arbitrary power, wreaks no acts of divine vengeance on those who oppose or slight him, works no miracles for himself alone.⁴ His miracles, largely healings and exorcisms, are always performed in response to the clamouring needs of

1. Born at Tarsus in A. D. 20, Apollonius was the most celebrated wonder-worker of the Hellenistic world. His miracles, some strongly reminiscent of those of Jesus, are reported in the third-century *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, a rather abridged translation of which is available in D. L. Dungan & D. R. Cartlidge, *Source Book of Texts for the Comparative Study of the Gospels* (Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature 1971) 259-96.

2. Cf. H. Murphet, *Sai Baba: Man of Miracles* (Madras: Macmillan 1971), for an impressive study of the apparently well authenticated miracles of this colourful personality.

3. Cf. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*. vol. I (London: Lutterworth Press 1963) 388-402; 410-15.

4. In striking contrast to the miracles reported in the apocryphal Infancy Gospels, where the child Jesus makes clay sparrows which fly away (Thom 2:1); strikes dead a boy who bumps into him (Thom 4:1); and, during the flight into Egypt makes a palm tree bend down to offer its fruit to his thirsty mother (Ps-Mt 20:2).

others. They are works of benevolence (better, acts of salvation),⁵ largely unspectacular in character, and intended not as works of wonder but as proclamations in action of religious truths.

How Jesus understood his miracles

Indeed the Jesus of the Gospels steadfastly refuses to work wonders that might compel the admiration of the crowds. One function at least of the Temptation Story (Mt 4: 1-11 = Lk 4:1-13) — a symbolic expression of undoubtedly real temptation experiences of Jesus, formulated in the form of a scribal disputation possibly by Jesus himself⁶ — is to show how decisively he rejected the popular messianic expectations of his time, which looked to the Messiah to repeat the wonders once wrought for Israel in the wilderness, and to seize political power with supra-natural aid. All such expectation Jesus rejects as diabolic. 'Signs and wonders' (marvels and prodigies) will be wrought by false Messiahs and false prophets who will lead many astray (Mk 13: 22). Jesus himself sharply refuses the request for a 'sign from heaven', that is for some suprabuman prodigy that would authenticate his mission. No such sign is to be given to this "evil and adulterous (i.e, faithless) generation", whose faithlessness is betrayed by its very demand for a sign (for a faith which looks for guarantees ceases to be faith) — except the sign of Jonah (Mt 12: 38-42 = Lk 11:29-32). What is offered here is not really a sign, as the Jews wanted it, but a challenge. His own summons to conversion (Mt 4:17), he claims, ought to be as self-authenticating as Jonah's proclamation of repentance to Nineveh, and should evoke the same unconditional response (Lk 11:30).⁷

Clearly, then, Jesus would not have regarded his miracles as 'signs from heaven', as prodigies functioning as authenticating

5. Cf. L. Legrand, "Christ's Miracles as 'Social Work'", *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies* 1 (1962) 43-64.

6. So J. Dupont, "L'arrière-fond biblique du récit des tentations de Jésus", *New Testament Studies* 3 (1952/53) 287-304.

7. Matthew's interpretation of the 'sign' as a reference to Jonah's three-day sojourn in the whale's belly, prefiguring the burial and resurrection of Jesus (12: 38-41) is certainly secondary. Cf. E. Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Matthaeus* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1973) 188-89.

proofs of his mission. He saw them rather, to use the word in a different and Johannine sense, as 'signs of the Kingdom'. To the disciples of the Baptist who come querying whether he is indeed the expected Messiah, Jesus replies by referring them to all that they have seen and heard — how "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them" (Mt 11: 2-4). This is not meant to be a catalogue of authenticating wonders, but is an impressionistic sketch, borrowing largely from Isaiah's lyrical description of the 'last day' (Is 35:5-6 + 61:1), of the new order of salvation which Jesus inaugurates; and in which, significantly, the proclamation of the good news to the poor figures as conspicuously as physical healings, and comes indeed as their climax and crown. And when he is accused by his enemies of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, Jesus again describes his exorcisms as signs of the saving presence of God: "if it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28). He sees his healings and exorcisms (and these are the only miracles of his that he speaks about in any of his genuine sayings) not as 'wonders', dazzling displays of his 'divine' power (in this they differed little, Mt 12:27 suggests, from the healings and exorcisms of his contemporaries), but as 'signs', intelligible indications, perceptible to those disposed to recognize them, that God is at work in him and that with him the promised age of definitive salvation has dawned.

The Miracles of Jesus in the New Testament Church

His understanding of his miracles is continued in the New Testament Church, though these miracles played there a much smaller part than is generally supposed⁸. Apart from the Gospels which report some thirty odd miracles worked by him⁹, and Acts, which refers obliquely to his miracles twice (2:22; 10:38) — while speaking frequently of miracles worked by the Apostles in his name (4:30; 4:43; 5:12; 14:13) — the New Testament

8. Cf. A. Fridrichsen, *Le problème du miracle dans le christianisme primitif* (Paris librairie Istra 1925) 16-46.

9. These comprise some 16 healings, 7 exorcisms, 3 resuscitations and 7 nature miracles.

does not mention the miracles of Jesus at all. Paul is silent about them, and so are the deuterō-Pauline letters, the epistles of Peter, John, James, and Jude and the Apocalypse. Even the Gospels play down rather than emphasize the role of miracles in the ministry of Jesus, and are careful to insist not on the 'wonder' character of the miracles they report, but on their theological meaning.

Words which underscore the 'wonder' character of a miracle like *thaumazia* (amazing events), *paradoxa* (strange things), *aretai* (wonderful deeds) — are avoided in the Gospels, even though frequent in the religious literature of the time. 'Signs and wonders' *sēmeia kai terata*, or, in the Synoptics, 'signs' (*sēmeia*) alone, are the standard Gospel expressions of marvellous prodigies and are used not for the miracles of Jesus, but for the spectacular magic deeds he deplores (Mt 12:28; Mk 13:22; Jn 4:48). Instead the miracles of Jesus are called *dynameis* (mighty works) in the Synoptics, a term which reminds us of the 'mighty deeds' wrought by Yahweh to save Israel in the wilderness. It identifies his miracles as saving acts; while in John they are called *sēmeia* (signs) — not in the Synoptic sense of 'prodigies', but with the specifically Johannine meaning of visible symbols of the saving activity of Jesus (2:11; 4:54 — or *erga* (works), that is, expressions of an activity which continues the saving work of the Father on earth (5:17; 7:3; 9:3; 10:32). In every case it is the symbolic rather than the 'wonder' character of the miracle that the term used expresses.¹⁰

It is for their theological meaning, then, rather than for their 'wonder' character that the Gospels narrate the miracles of Jesus. This meaning is spelled out in the four Gospels, each of which takes up his understanding of his miracles as signs of 'the Kingdom', and unfolds it, each in its own particular way.¹¹

10. Cf. R. H. Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles* (London: SCM Press 1966) 15-17; C. F. D. Moule, "The Vocabulary of Miracle", in *ibid.* (ed), *Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History* (London: Mowbray 1965) 235-38.

11. On the way in which the miracles of Jesus are handled in the four Gospels cf. A. Richardson, *The Miracle Stories of the Gospels* (London: SCM Press 1941) 100-22; A. Duprez, "Les

Limitations of space prevent an examination of the miracle tradition of all the four Gospels, and so this enquiry is limited to the first two only (Mt and Mk), which treat of the miracles extensively enough to provide an adequate picture.

The miracles of Jesus in Mark

Mark interprets the miracles of Jesus in terms of the Jewish apocalyptic, which pictures the coming of 'the Kingdom' as a massive cosmic conflict.¹² God's rule can be established only to the extent that the rule of Satan (who is in effective command over the world in its 'present age', its *kaliyuga* of hopeless subjection to injustice, sickness, sin and death) is brought to an end. The 'strong man' must be bound before he can be despoiled of his goods (Mk 3:27). The miracles of Jesus for Mark are plundering of the 'strong man', who has been bound (rendered powerless, though not yet decisively defeated) by the coming of Jesus, and more specifically by the signal victory over Satan cryptically reported in Mark's story of the Temptation (Mk 1: 9-11).¹³ That is why exorcisms are so conspicuous a feature of Mark's Gospel (1: 23-27; 1: 34-39; 3:11; 5: 1-20; 7: 26-30; 9: 14-28); why he begins his account of the ministry of Jesus with an exorcism, presented as a typical expression of the 'authority' of Jesus (1: 23-28); and why he can describe even a 'nature' miracle like the stilling of the storm (4: 35-41) as an exorcism, in which Jesus 'threatens' (*epitiman*) the wind, and

recits evangeliques de miracles", *Lumiere et Vie* XXIII/119 (1974) 49-69; and the issue of *Cahiers Evangile* entitled *Les miraeles de l'Evangile* (New series 8 - May 1974) 19-44.

12. Cf. M. E. Glasswell, "The Use of Miracles in the Marken Gospel", in Moule, *op. cit.* (see n. 10) 149-62. Other useful studies on the miracles in Mark are: T. A. Burkill, "The Notion of Miracle with Special Reference to Mark's Gospel", *Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 50 (1959) 33-73; T. Snoy, "Les miracles dans l'évangile de Marc", *Revue Theologique de Louvain* 4 (1973) 58-101; and (the major work on the subject) K. Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium* (Muenchen: Koesel Verlag 1970).

13. Cf. J. M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (London: SCM Press 1957) 26-42.

orders the sea to 'be still' (*phimoun*), just as he had once (1: 23-27) 'threatened' (*epitiman*) the possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum (1: 23-27) and ordered him to 'keep quiet' (*phimoun*). Natural catastrophes no less than sin, sickness and death, are the 'signs' of Satan's rule, and with the coming of Jesus this rule is everywhere breaking down.

The miracles of Jesus in Mark are part of a great, poly-faceted process of liberation which Jesus comes to proclaim and achieve (cosmic, physical, psychic, social, religious) from Satan and all the adjuncts of his rule. For Jesus liberates not just from demonic possession (1: 23-27) and sin (2: 1-12), not only from sickness (1: 29-31) and death (5: 21-42), not merely from the destructive forces of nature which threaten us (4: 35-41), but equally, and indeed specially from the ignominy of social ostracism (2: 13-17) and from the crippling tyranny of a dead ritualism (7: 1-6) and an oppressive law (2: 23-27).

As elements in this total liberation the miracles are saving events. But the salvation they bring is partial and provisional. The decisive saving event, the final overthrow of Satan's rule, the definitive expulsion of the 'strong man', is accomplished only with the death and resurrection of Jesus (15: 38f) and will be brought to completion only at the Parousia (14: 62). Meanwhile the miracles are anticipations of the new order which the death and resurrection of Jesus will bring, and they give us a foretaste as it were of a parousiaic existence.

It is to emphasize their provisional character, no doubt, that Mark ties up his accounts of the miracles with a puzzling demand for secrecy. Demons who proclaim Jesus' identity are harshly silenced (1:25; 1:34; 3:12), and those who have been healed are ordered not to make their healing known (1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). The meaning of this so-called messianic secret is much disputed,¹⁴ but it is very probable that the secret is a device Mark uses to bridge the gap between his miracle-story tradition

14. For a brief survey of opinions cf. W. G. Kuemmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM Press 1966) 66-67. For a more extensive study see G. Minette de Tillesse, *Le secret messianique dans l'Evangile de Marc* (Paris: Cerf 1968).

and its picture of Jesus as a triumphant wonder-worker, and his originally independent Passion Narrative (it is Mark who first puts the two together and obtains a 'Gospel'!)¹⁵ with its wholly different picture of Jesus as the lowly but righteous sufferer. What Mark is telling us in his messianic secret, then, is that it is from the Passion rather than the miracle of Jesus, that we ultimately know who Jesus really is; so that it is only at the moment of his death in total abandonment that his true identity is officially disclosed, when the centurion proclaims him to be "the Son of God" (15:39). The followers of Jesus, then, are not to hanker after miracles, which are obscure signs only, but should follow him along the way of the Cross (8: 34; 39: 1) through which alone the saving reality signified by the miracles is truly attained.

The miracles of Jesus in Matthew

The significance of the miracles is expounded by Matthew in a more elaborate and systematic way.¹⁶ Miracle stories scattered all over Mark have been assembled by Matthew into a cycle of ten miracles (Mt 8-9), placed immediately after the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), with two identical summaries of the teaching and healing activity of Jesus (4:23-9:35) framing the two collections into a unity. Matthew begins his description of the Galilean ministry of Jesus with a diptych, a two-panelled portrait

15. John too (independently?) fashions a Gospel by combining a collection of miracle stories (his 'Signs Source') with a Passion Narrative. On the implications of this for the development of the Gospel form, cf. J. M. Robinson, "The Johannine Trajectory", in J. M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1971) 232-68

16. On Matthew's theology of the miracles of Jesus cf. the now classic work of H. J. Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories", In G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (London: SCM Press 1963) 165-303. Also, more recently, K. Gatzweiler, "Les récits de miracles dans l'Évangile selon saint Matthieu", in M. Didier (ed), *L'Évangile selon Matthieu: Rédaction et théologie* (Gembloux: Duculot 1972) 209-20.

which shows him as the Messiah in his words (Sermon on the Mount) and in his works (the miracle cycle).

This first insight into the miracles of Jesus, which sees them as the works of the Messiah, closely associated with his words and like them serving as proclamations of 'the Kingdom' (11: 2-4), is deepened and further elaborated by Matthew in his miracle cycle (Mt 8-9), a masterpiece of theologically significant construction, brilliantly organized into a compact, informative treatise on what the miracles of Jesus mean.¹⁷ The ten miracles of the group have been arranged into three groups of three miracles each, with a concluding miracle to round off the set. The sayings of Jesus (8: 18-22) and 'pronouncement' stories providing schematic settings for his sayings (9: 9-17) separate one group from another and serve as pointers to the meaning of the group. Each group illustrates one particular theme of the miracle-theology of Matthew, so that they successively present the miracles of Jesus as the works of the 'servant messiah' prefigured in Isaiah (Mt. 8: 1-17); as the 'mighty deeds' of the Lord who can protect his imperilled community from all destructive forces (the sea, Satan, sin) which threaten it, and so deserves his absolute trust (8: 23; 9: 8); and as works performed in response to the recipient's faith (9: 18-31). It is the concluding miracle of the cycle, the healing of a dumb demoniac (9: 32-34) which caps Matthew's teaching on the miracles of Jesus and forcefully expresses his attitude to the miraculous.

This concluding miracle is narrated so schematically that it is obviously intended merely as a setting for the double chorus with which the narrative (and indeed the whole miracle cycle) ends.¹⁸ The crowds marvel: "Never was anything like this done

17. Cf. W. G. Thompson, "Reflections on the Composition of Mt 8: 1-9, 34", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33 (1971) 365-88; Held, *op. cit.* (see n. 16) 246-53.

18. The miracle in Mt 9: 32-34 is probably an abbreviated version of the healing of the blind and dumb possessed person reported in Mt 12: 22-25 = Lk 11: 14-16, and duplicated here by Matthew just to provide his Miracle Cycle with an appropriate ending.

in Israel; the Pharisees complain: "he casts out demons by the prince of demons" (9:34). Clearly, the miracles of Jesus are not for Matthew compelling proofs of his mission. They decide nothing, but only provoke the same division that his other words and works (his proclamation of the Kingdom, his parables, his interpretation of the Law, his violations of the Sabbath, his table-fellowship with social and religious outcasts) continually do. The miracles of Jesus do not create faith but presuppose it. Faith is needed in the recipient if Jesus is to work a miracle at all (9: 22,29, but specially Mk. 6: 6). Faith is necessary in the bystanders if the miracle is to be recognized for what it is – not an empty conjuring trick, nor an act of sorcery, but a sign of the power and the presence of God (7: 34). The miracles of Jesus, like everything he is and does, are thus challenges to our faith. Each is a minigospel, a proclamation in action of the 'good news' of salvation in Jesus, which like the proclamation of the 'good news' in word, can be accepted in faith or rejected in unbelief.

The miracles of Jesus today

The New Testament shows the miracles of Jesus not as compelling 'proofs' which decisively authenticate his person and mission from outside but as 'signs', indications perceptible to those disposed to receive them (those enlightened by faith and instructed in the Scriptures) that God is truly at work in Jesus for the liberation of men. Nowhere, indeed, does the New Testament attempt a miracle-based apologetic.¹⁹ Instead it is to the prophetic authority of Scripture (Mt 8:17; 12: 17–21; Lk 24: 27,44; Jn 12: 38) and to the witness of the apostolic community (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 1 Cor 15: 3–11) that it appeals in order to justify its faith in Jesus, and the Gospel miracles become significant only in the context of this testimony.

This is inevitable, given the mentality of the early Jewish Christian communities in which the Gospel traditions first took

19. Traces of such an apologetic may perhaps be detected in some of the later writings of the New Testament (like Acts) which derive from a Hellenistic milieu – cf. G. W. H. Lampe, "Miracles in the Acts of the Apostles", in Moule, *op. cit.* (see n. 10) 163–78.

shape. To these first Christians, who thought in terms of history rather than of nature, and for whom the universe was not so much a *cosmos* (an organized system of a strictly predictable natural causality) as a *creation* (a world dependent on and directed by the free activity of personal supra-natural forces: God, angels and demons),²⁰ miracles were indeed unusual and striking, but not necessarily exceptional, and much less 'supra-natural' events. Their particular 'world-view' knew nothing of 'nature'. Miracles in fact were for them (as they are in Indian village today) part of the normal order of things. Jewish exorcists cast out demons as successfully as Jesus did (Mt 12: 28; Mk 5: 38-41; Acts 18: 31). Greek magicians like Simon Magus (Acts 8: 9ff) worked wonders no less spectacular than those of the Apostles. What mattered was not so much the occurrence of a miracle (this was 'normal'), as its origin and meaning. Miracles were ambiguous in character (divine, magical or diabolic) needing to be discerned. They guaranteed nothing, for they needed to be guaranteed themselves. The Gospel miracles do not authenticate Jesus but are authenticated by him! It is ultimately the character of Jesus and the accordance with Scripture of his words and works that ultimately guarantee his miracles as indeed deriving from the power of God.

This 'world-view' of the Gospels determines not only their attitudes to the miraculous in general, but their understanding of the individual miracles as well. It is clear enough that the Gospel miracle stories reflect consistently a primitive cosmology, in which diseases are caused by demons, not germs (so Jesus 'rebukes' a fever in Lk 4:39); in which the sea is the natural home of demonic powers of destruction (so Jesus exorcises the sea in Mk 4:39; on the other hand, the herd of possessed swine in Mk 5:13 run headlong into the sea, taking their demon back to his natural place, and so restoring the right order of things). In it cases of hysterical dumbness (Mt 9:32) or epilepsy (Mk 9: 17f) are attributed to possession.

20. Cf. J. M. Court, "The Philosophy of the Synoptic Miracles", *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972) 1-18; J. P. Ross, "Some Notes on Miracle in the Old Testament", in Moule, *op. cit.* (see n. 10) 43-60.

Such a cosmology, indeed the whole apocalyptic 'world-view' of New Testament times, is obviously quite alien to us today. For in spite of the growing fascination of the occult for us (finding its latest expression in the sick sensationalism of the *Exorcist*), and the explosive eruption of the charismatic movement with its easy familiarity with the miraculous, we today can scarcely picture the world as the battle-ground of conflicting supra-natural forces, divine and demonic. As citizens of a science-dominated space age, we experience it rather as an orderly, self-contained system of natural causality, operating according to strictly predictable patterns, which can be formulated in precise and utterly reliable laws.²¹

The vast success of science is due to its long experience which has been tested by sustained observation and experiment in regard to the absolute regularity of nature. All its dazzling success has depended on this. One could scarcely put a man on the moon if the flight of the space capsule were subject to the arbitrary whims of demons or gods! On it depends the growing ability of science to explain the hitherto inexplicable, so that yesterdays 'miracles' are the commonplaces of today. All this makes it increasingly difficult to conceive of exceptions to the laws (as a miracle would be defined today)²² and to recognize such exceptions if they do indeed occur. What now seem to be

21. The indeterminism of the sub-atomic world does not change this. For though, at the microcosmic level, the behaviour of individual particles is determined by statistical laws (half a given number of photons will pass through a crystal grating in a given time, though we can in no way tell whether any one given photon will pass through or not), yet at the macrocosmic level, the level of human experience, the numbers involved are so great that the statistical probability amounts in fact to certainty.— E. & M - L. Keller, *Miracles in Dispute* (London: SCM Press 1969) 159-80.

22. Cf. the standard definition in traditional theological manuals: "*eventus sensibilis praeter communem cursum naturae divinitus factus* — an event beyond the ordinary processes of nature effected through divine agency. The definition like most of the modern discussion on miracles, goes back to Hume, for whom a miracle could be accurately defined "a transgression of

supra-natural events may well lie within the undiscovered potentialities of nature (for who can tell what nature can or cannot do?) Today's 'miracles' may well have a simple explanation tomorrow. Science cannot rule out the possibility of miracles, for to do so it would have to transgress the limits of its competence and pronounce on the supra-natural, which is by definition outside the reach of its investigating techniques.²³ But it does make belief in miracles a good deal more problematic than in the uncomplicated days when the Gospels were written.

The problem is aggravated for the case of Jesus' miracles by the encroachments of history. A critical study of the Gospels has shown us how difficult it is today to establish the historicity of the miracles they narrate. Widely different versions of the same miracle confront us in the Gospels (compare the healing of the centurion's servant in Mt 8: 5-13; Lk 7: 1-10; and Jn 4: 46-54), suggesting that the Gospel miracle stories were not handed down as scrupulously accurate reports of what actually happened, but are, like the rest of the Gospel material, sedimentations of a theologically loaded tradition, considerably touched up while being transmitted orally in a community before the Gospels were written, and again when it was written up in the Synoptic Gospels, especially John.²⁴ While there is no doubt a solid historical nucleus of the Gospel miracle tradition — for the tradition is ancient, extensive, borne out by unusual sobriety and guaranteed by certainly genuine sayings of Jesus in which he claims to have cast out demons (Mt 12:28) and healed diseases (Mt 11: 2-4) — it is by no means easy (nor always possible) to say what exactly

a law of nature by a particular volition of a deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent". For the serious philosophical problems which such an understanding of a miracle raises, cf. R. Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (London: Macmillan 1970).

23. Brilliantly demonstrated by I. T. Ramsey in his essay "Miracles: an exercise in Logical Mapwork", published in the SPCK Theological Collection entitled *Miracles and the Resurrection* (London: SPCK 1964).

24. Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, "Are the Gospels Historical?" *Clergy Monthly* 38 (1974) 64-49.

happened on any given occasion, or to show that what did happen was, in fact, a miracle as we would understand it today.²⁵

Understanding the miracles of Jesus

What then are we to make of the miracles of Jesus in this age of critical history and natural science? How should we interpret them so that they may become intelligible and religiously meaningful for man today? Not, surely, by going back to the miracle-based apologetic of 'traditional' theology – the defensive, over-abstract, largely unbiblical theology of the 'siege years' from Trent to Vatican II – in which the miracles of Jesus (understood as divine interventions in the order of nature) were built up into unassailable credentials of his divine mission, if not irrefutable proofs of his divinity. An apologetic of this kind is hopelessly obsolete. It starts off with a distorted idea of faith, as if it needed, or were compatible with, 'proofs' and uses a quite unbiblical concept of miracles, as if the Gospel miracles were prodigies perceptible in themselves without the illumination of faith. It breaks down wholly when faced with the historical uncertainties of the Gospel miracle tradition revealed by critical exegesis, or with the philosophical difficulty of recognizing a supra-natural miracle, given the open-ended progress of science and the new potentialities of nature it is continually revealing.

What really matters, then, is not the 'how' of the miracles of Jesus (their physical structure), but their 'why' and their 'what' (their meaning). Here the accounts in the Gospels remain normal. The miracles of Jesus (no matter how we choose to explain them) are for us too 'signs of the Kingdom'. They announce and actualize (make present) the saving action of God, and reveal the particular form that it takes. For the miracles of Jesus are signs of the cosmic dimensions of the salvation he brings. They tell us that the Kingdom of God is not hidden in the privacy of a personal existentialist decision; it is not resolved by a flight from the cosmos; it does not come in a moment of gnostic enlightenment or at a peak experience of charismatic

25. Cf. Fuller, *op. cit.* (see n. 10) 18–39; R. Latourelle, "Authenticité historique des miracles de Jésus: Essai de critériologie", *Gregorianum* 54 (1973) 225–62.

ecstasy. 'The Kingdom' brings the total liberation of man from all the forms of unfreedom (cosmic, social, personal) that constrain him. 'The Kingdom' means, the miracles of Jesus tell us, that the whole of man is wholly saved.

Signs, however, change. They age, grow dull with use, become obsolete, break down. Signs that speak out loud and clear to one generation are inarticulate in the next. The contemporaries of Jesus were conscious of their alienation, their state of unfreedom, their need for the liberating grace of God, primarily in their experience of utter helplessness in face of the dark ominous forces of nature that threatened them. They were continually menaced by the arbitrary violence of natural cataclysms, threatened by uncontrollable endemic diseases, paralysed by a pervasive fear of the countless malignant demons with which they had peopled their world. They were exposed to sudden famines, lived always on the edge of want, and were ever anguished by the intractable finality of death. For them healings, exorcisms, raisings from the dead, the stilling of the storm, the multiplication of bread, would have been indeed reassuring signs that spoke tellingly of the gracious liberating presence of God, and pointed to the new order of freedom and life which only God can give.

But are these appropriate signs today, for us who live in a world whose self-understanding is so vastly different from that of New Testament times? Demons have departed from our world, drummed out by the relentless march of a ruthlessly rationalist science;²⁶ and nature though it still threatens no longer terrifies, for we have learned to recognize its forces as challenges to be controlled, not malignant powers to be feared. Sickness yields to the growing assurance of a medicine that has learned to control leprosy and may soon eradicate infectious diseases from the earth. Cases of 'possession' are successfully treated in psychiatric

26. The rejection of 'demons', ultimately cosmological principles of animist origin, does not necessarily mean the denial of Satan, a personal power of evil. But Satan too is increasingly in theological trouble: cf. H. A. Kelly. *Towards the Death of Satan* (London: Chapman 1968).

wards. The world finds itself at last with the means (if not yet the will) to adequately feed its poor. Human effort accomplishes today what was once looked for as a miracle from God.

It is not in sickness, then, or in hunger or the menace of storms or the fear of demons, that man, today, experiences his need for the liberating power of God. The signs of his helplessness are elsewhere: in his anguished loneliness, and in his desperate attempts to build up relationships, in his tragic sense of the meaninglessness of life, in his terror at the chilling immensity of the universe he lives in, in his helpless awareness of the infinite depths of his own selfishness and the flaring violence of his aggressions, in his despairing confrontation with the vast systems of injustice and oppression under which he suffers helplessly or to which he unwillingly belongs, in his silent raging at the absurd climax of death.

It is to these needs that today's signs of the Kingdom must speak. They are the *præparatio evangelica* for man today, the propaedeutic which disposes him to long for, to recognize and to grasp at, the salvation freely offered to him in Jesus. Apocalyptic expectation has long given way to social concern. It is in the idiom of this new mood that the word of God must now speak. And indeed, were Jesus to appear among us today, would he, one wonders, come as a healer and exorcist, competing with the doctors and psychiatrists who have adequately assumed these functions? Would he not come rather as one who gives vision and purpose to a dispirited and drifting people, who sparks hope in a people driven to despair? Would he not open their eyes to the grim realities of injustice and oppression among which they blissfully live in stubborn blindness, rouse them from their paralyzed inaction and strengthen their sinews so that they may stand up for the poor to whom he proclaimed (how ironical it sometimes sounds!) the 'good news' of salvation? Would he not exorcize the demons of self-righteousness, of intolerance, of the lust for power, of divisiveness, casteism and unconcern, which sit contentedly in the swept and empty spaces of their lives? Would he not start fashioning communities in which the outcaste would be welcome and the oppressed find relief; communities in which men would learn the courage to love, find the strength

for commitment, and be given the truly suprahuman ability to forgive? And would not these be 'miracles' more potent than any he has wrought, 'signs' more telling, because closer to the reality they signify, than any healing or exorcism speaking powerfully to us of the victory over evil which Jesus has won, and of the new life of freedom in the Spirit he has come to give? Should not these be the miracles we must look for today? For are they not ultimately the touchstone of the presence of Christ in our midst, and of the coming of God's Kingdom among us?

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God is Met in the Ordinary

A boy 15 years old was for about two months a patient in our hospital. The trouble was not an infection of the glands, as we had expected, but cancer. He came of a poor family; we gave him food. Whenever he got a meal from home he would keep a share for us. We became friends. Before long his mother was admitted to give birth to her tenth child. A week after they returned home - the mother, the dying boy and a new-born baby. We paid them a visit. A small path over a rocky hill led for an hour away from the road, to the poor hut, kept very clean. The boy was lying on the only "bed" they had - a smile on his face and concern about a drink for us. How affectionately he called to us. The family looked happy. They could accept a dying child among them without a sense of tragedy.

What gave them the strength to be so happy and at peace? Was it Jesus, who was present to them? For they are Christians. Was it God, Providence, who gave them trust?

Was their love for each other, their concern, their sense of belonging, which made them happy, and through this, unexpectedly, unconsciously, they experienced God? This visit was for me a deep experience of God's presence, an experience of his touch and his nearness, deeper than I would have felt it in an elaborate liturgy or in a theological discussion. I realized afresh the truth of the Gospel that God is revealed in the ordinary, in life itself, that God is met in the heart of the simple, the small and the hidden, that God is there "in the least of our brothers" (Mt 25).

"To such as these belongs the Kingdom" (Lk 18: 15-17); to the insignificant, the unlearned and the simple. "Let the little children come to me" was Jesus' wish against the annoyance of his followers who wanted to chase them away. "Let them come - and unless you be converted and change and become like children you will never enter the Kingdom" (Mt 18: 3). for in a child something of God's heart and the mystery of his kingdom are revealed.

The Magi, coming from afar in search of a King, and the shepherds to whom a great array of angels announced the Saviour, were led to the most ordinary, everyday scene: they found a mother and her child. They understood, their hearts were open to God's surprises, they recognized God's presence in this child. From then onwards Jesus is met in every child (Mt 18: 5). God is revealed through children and seen in them.

To see a baby grow, to watch a child - all life, play, joy - is to experience the "joy of living" which is basic and essential to humanness. It makes us sense and grasp a new quality of life - openness, promise and trust, dependence on love, acceptance. God is like this, "dancing for us in joy, Yahweh our God in our midst, renewing us by his love" (Soph 3:17). Jesus is thrilled with joy - and we too - before the greatness of love, shown and revealed in the unlearned, the small, in mere children whose smile touches our heart and brings us back to trust and hope (Lk 10:21).

God is hidden even in the small things around us, in everyday realities. Jesus opens our eyes and hearts to them. Flowers and birds which are so well cared for tell us how much more God would care for us (Mt 6:25-33). Rain and sunshine reveal the generosity of his love for all men regardless of how they live and who they are (Mt 5:45). Seeds sown, some of them lost on rocky ground or on thorns, tell of the risk God takes to reach man's heart (Mt 13:1). The parable of the precious pearl urges us to take the chance of the "one thing necessary", the openness of the heart to love (Mt 13: 45-46; Lk 10:42).

Above all God is in men: he is on their side. Jesus' name is Emmanuel, God-with-us, and his life shows that each person is important to God and that no group or caste of people has a "privilege" or a "hold" on him, but that what counts is an open heart to see and understand his offer of love. It was the shepherds and villagers, not the religious experts, who found Jesus, the new-born. It was strangers from afar following a light, who found Jesus, the child, - not the people in Jerusalem near-by, the theologians and specialists who were able to trace the Messiah's birth exactly in their books and documents, their thorah and theology. It was those to whom such knowledge remained outside their hearts. It was fishermen, simple, uneducated labourers, who became Jesus' friends and companions. He was familiar with people expelled from the places of worship because of their connection with the Romans or because of their immoral life. He took children in his arms and caressed them. He had eyes and a heart for men. He watched and observed. "Look - the gift of this widow - she gave all she had" (Lk 21:1-8). Can only the poor be so totally generous? But he gives a chance too to Zachaeus who is rich and is an oppressor, being one of the top-tax collectors. Jesus recognizes something authentic in the rich man who was not afraid of inviting the ridicule of others by climbing a tree. Zachaeus' heart opened, he was ready to share and give away much more than official religion required. Jesus is everywhere where men are ready to listen, to open their hearts to God and to the brother beside them.

Where then is he today? Moving with people, in crowded buses, in waiting faces, in the coolie and the sweeper, in the cook who is my neighbour, in the mother weeping over her dying

child, in the widow who is left with seven children and who has nothing but a little black coffee to give to her new-born.... Where should we look for God and Jesus?

A few days spent in a fishing village where some priest friends of mine live with the people who are an out-caste community, made me touch "God in the midst of us" again. They share the people's life in their daily struggle and work on the seashore, eating the same food (or even worse!). The villagers have become their brothers and friends. Even we were taken into their group, and allowed to participate in their joy out on the sea. The priests' house is open to all — a home where everyone is welcome, listened to, accepted; where we could come, discuss, and share ideas and concerns. Late at night, our togetherness culminates in a simple prayer of thanksgiving "where words are uttered which normally would remain unspoken", and in silent worship — an experience of deep communion among ourselves and of the presence of Jesus who promised to be with us even when we gather only two or three, in his name (Mt 18:20).

What then is his name? It is much more than a label. It is reality. His name is Peace (Eph 2:14). His name is, Yes, — fidelity, faithfulness (2 Cor 2:19; Rev 4:14). He is Freedom removing all veils and walls (2 Cor 3:17). He is Life and Truth (Jo 14:6), Justice (Mt 23:23), and Dignity (Lk 13: 10-16), and Forgiveness breathed on us (Jo 20:22f), to be shared with all men, He is Bread for the hungry, (Jo 6). He is the Man for men (Jo 5:6 and 19:5).

Where these realities are present God is: not only where men struggle for these realities against oppressing and dehumanizing forces but also where these realities are coming into being, are lived already in commonplace, hidden, simple relationships of ordinary people, in little kindnesses, in forgiving, in loving service.

The experience in our own house, where we are trying to let a new type of Christian community be born out of our daily life, is an experience of meeting Jesus and one another in him in a new, fresh way. Our small group who work in a rural hospital — nurses, helpers, kitchengirl, doctor — coming from very different

backgrounds, countries, churches, social settings and with different degree of education is a community in which we try to live together, putting the values of love, openness, forgiveness, sincerity.... before all else. Concern for one another and for all who come our way is basic to our open house. Here groups and individuals can share our life, and all sorts of people meet: some who are not accepted in society, "run-aways", ex-nuns, others who come from broken homes, who are beaten and ill-treated, a prostitute who has nowhere to go, a mental patient and her baby abandoned by her family, a pregnant unmarried girl, an emaciated baby who slowly becomes our "sunshine". People old and young, strangers and friends, who stay for hours or days or months.... All live together. We share meals, we discuss ideas - also get on one another's nerves, yet, accept one another. We want to grow together. One day we exchanged our saris as a sign of love, of readiness to give something up for one another, to express our belonging, to bring joy. Often we join together in prayer and worship, and come to feel the call of Jesus to all who are burdened and bent under heavy loads and pressures. His yoke becomes light because in solidarity even suffering and pain are borne easier, in the hope and promise that love can bear everything (Mt 11: 28-30; 1 Cor 13).

Service of the sick and the poor in our hospital, is given in an atmosphere of trust, confidence and availability and often we achieve the experience Jesus and his disciples had (Mk 6: 31): so many are coming, at all hours, there is no time to rest, but the continuous demand of those who seek help. These are hours filled with his presence and with the kindness which constitutes his encounter with people (Mt 9:13).

At times we go out to the homes of the patients, to their simple houses and poor huts. Each time one returns with a deeper sense of God's presence there where people love, where children play, where we meet and listen to each other, where we try to understand, where simple men tell of my shortcomings and faults, - with a smile of understanding and forgiveness. "Wherever there is love, God is present", comes true as we experience it in the life of the common man and woman, in the simple realities of daily life.

Jesus himself chose the ordinary, unassuming way of life, not because of outward success, but because of the inner power and strength of love, living from God's word humbly every day, trusting in God's care. He didn't turn stones into bread to feed the hungry, but he changed human hearts to share their food with the needy, to break their bread with one another. It is in such gestures that we can recognize him and the love which makes our hearts burn.

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Jesus Means Truth - that Sets Men Free

Re-reading the Scriptures in an Indian context

Jesus Christ is mystery. His mystery eludes theology, dogma and creeds. On the one hand the manifold face of his mystery is revealed gradually and simultaneously, according to his logic of love. On the other, each epoch approaches Jesus with its own problems, and questions him in order to find its needs and longings fulfilled. Thus, both the divine pedagogy and human aspirations give rise to different images and diverse names of Jesus like the Messiah, the Lord, Saviour, Redeemer, High Priest, King and Prophet, the Man for others etc.

Indeed it is imperative that each new generation looks at Jesus with its own authentic faith (without merely holding on to borrowed convictions). Each generation is then called on to interpret Jesus Christ, faithful to its own special experience of his mystery and rooted, all the same, in apostolic origins.

Any new look at the mystery of Jesus Christ is obviously born of the deeper penetration of the Scriptures induced by the Spirit who operates in us through concrete life-situations. While working in the changing and developing situations and urging us to open the Scriptures, the same Spirit, indwelling in us, enables us to see in that mirror new reflections of Christic mystery which answer our anguished gazes.

And so, today, developing countries like South America are struggling to interpret Jesus as the Liberator from oppressive structures of economic power-blocs, and the developed countries are trying to find Jesus as the one who frees men from the bondage of material affluence and spiritual apathy, from psychic depression and economic consumerism. Both, however, look towards him as the type and exemplar of freed humanity.

In India both these aspirations are strongly felt. As a developing country we would like Jesus to liberate us from poverty, corruption and superstitions; as a religious country seeking self-realization, we look towards Jesus to free us from every bond of unfreedom. Such an urge and need to find in Jesus both liberation from oppressive structures and situations and freedom for immortality, impel us to re-read the Scriptures in our Indian context today.

As we search the Scriptures, familiar texts such as Exodus 14-15, Isaiah 58-60, Romans 8, Galatians 5, 2, Cor 3, Col 3. etc. meet our eyes. For the reflection here however, the text of John 8:36 is chosen; for, it looks immediately relevant to, and significant for the Indian context, the more so because Gandhiji seems to have lived out its message.

Truth that sets men free (John 8:36)

The discourse in the 8th chapter of John is placed in the setting of the feast of the Tabernacles amidst the ceremonies of light. The setting is an appropriate backdrop for Jesus' proclamation of himself as Light (8:12) and his ensuing confrontation with the Jewish leaders. It symbolizes the conflict between Light and darkness, Truth and lies, Freedom and slavery. From the start the chapter emerges as the opposition between light and darkness heralded in the prologue and concluded with the cure

of the blind man (Chapter 9). The whole Chapter, in dialogue and argument, portrays Christ as the one who liberates the disciples from darkness and untruth.

On a close analysis we find that the themes of freedom and slavery and of being true descendants of Abraham run through Jn 8: 31-41. The import of these verses becomes clear if we remember that Jn. was directed at Christian Jews who were hesitating between their obligations to the Synagogue and their ancestral customs, on the one hand, and to their belief in Jesus on the other. In particular, verse 31 clearly reminds them that what distinguishes the true disciple of Jesus is abiding in His word and not any special loyalty to the Law. For, 'They will know the truth and the truth will make them free' (v. 32). This verse (32) becomes a crucial issue in search for truth and freedom.

Unlike Pilate we do not ask what truth is (Jn 20: 37); for, already in the prologue, John confesses, "we saw his glory, full of grace and truth". Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (1: 14 & 17). The prologue presents him as the *true* light" (1: 9). Then there are Jesus' own 'I-am' sayings: "I am the way, I am the truth" (14: 6), "I am the *true* bread" (6: 32), "I am the *true* vine" (15: 1). All these self-attestations affirm that Jesus in his very person is the Truth.

Because Jesus declares himself to be the Truth (overstepping the Law) and promises to set them free, the arguing Jewish leaders became infuriated and provoked to strong reaction (8:39). Despite centuries of foreign domination the Jews believed themselves, above all other men, to be free. "We are the descendants of Abraham and we have never been anybody's slaves." (8: 33) In answer Jesus said, "everyone who acts sinfully is a slave" (8: 34), implying that simply to be a Jew does not make one free, and that he sets free everyman who is in the bondage of sin.

Towards a relevant Interpretation

Understanding the passage in its original context clears the way to interpret it in our situation. To start with, the passage makes it clear that Jesus himself is the Truth and hence the Truth is a Person. Consequently neither law nor doctrine could be Truth.

Next follows the significance of declaring the Truth as a Person. Because the Truth is a Person, the freedom truth offers is to make us persons, and to be free is to be fully a person. So, Jesus, who encounters us as persons, makes us know the truth about ourselves and sets us free from impersonal and unpersonal forces.

Freedom from bondage, in this perspective, would not be merely individual and spiritual, since unfreedom implies a social, historical fact, the absence of brotherhood, the breath of friendship with persons. The slavery of sin is manifest in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination of peoples and races; sin appears as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice.¹

Sin, therefore, demands a radical liberation. This radical liberation is the gift which Christ offers men in order to make them fully freed persons. Such a vision of liberation is forcefully offered by the Synod of Medellin². It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh so that he may liberate all men from all slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression, and ignorance, in a word, injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.

What strikes us as more relevant in the passage is that the words of Jesus, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free", is a promise. This promise ought to be related to the Spirit of truth He promised to send, during the discourse of the Last Supper: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all the truth". (16:13 also 14:16). Hence freedom is a promised gift realized through the Spirit of truth. To be set free, then is a process begun at the effusion of the Spirit in the Resurrection and continuing till the time of Parousia.

The continuous guidance of the Spirit of truth till the end suggests that both the finding of the truth and the realizing of freedom is an endless journey, an unending pilgrimage, and an ever-growing experience. In fact, knowing the truth and finding

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1. See. G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*. (Orbis Books, N. Y. 1973) p. 175.
 2. As cited by Gutierrez p. 176.

freedom are both a continuous gift of the Spirit and an unending task of the believer. It is both a permanent struggle and a (realized) liberation.

An Indian interpretation

Now, does such an understanding of the text of John on truth and freedom have any special significance to the Church in India? Could an Indian reading of the text offer any relevant insight needed by the communities in India? And what would it mean to give an Indian interpretation to the text of John we are considering?

Surely, the words of Jesus that 'Truth will make you free' is not unfamiliar to Indian ears and hearts. In India, Rishis, Munis, Sadhus, Bhaktas, Yogis, have been searching for truth and have been longing for freedom from *Samsara* (*Mukti*). Down the ages the oft-repeated prayer from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

"From Untruth lead me to Truth....

From death lead me to Immortality" (1,3,28)

reveals India's relentless quest for truth in attaining the freedom of immortality.

Happily, even today, in the secular state of India, below the national emblem, the words '*Satyameva Jayate*', from the Mundaka Upanishad, are inscribed as the motto of our democracy³. But, above all, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, seems to have summed up India's ageless quest for truth and freedom, and demonstrated the Indian motto with the concrete achievement of his whole life. And when we look at the life of Gandhiji we seem to read a live commentary on the text from John.

We know well Gandhiji looked at his whole life as a series of experiments with truth. In the introduction to his autobiography Gandhiji writes, "It is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of

3. See India - A Reference Annual 1974
(Government of India Publication Division) p. 17

an autobiography”⁴. About the aim of all these experiments, he says: “What I want to achieve, what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self realization, to see God face to face, to attain Mokṣa (freedom from birth and death)”⁵.

Freed from the untruth of pride, as a result of his search for truth, he confessed, “I claim to be making a ceaseless effort to find truth; but I admit that I have not yet found it; I am painfully conscious of my imperfection and therein lies the strength that I possess”⁶.

As he acknowledged,⁷ his experiments with truth did not stop with the personal pursuit of freedom, but embraced all his struggles for that of the country. Did he not originate the *Satyagraha* (*satya* ‘truth’, ‘*graha*’, firmness) movement to fight for the independence of India? Convinced of the truth, the force he was employing in the struggle against foreign rule, Gandhiji assured his followers, “Where the means are clean, there God is undoubtedly present with his blessings. And where these three combine, there defeat is an impossibility. A *satyagrahi*, whether free or incarcerated, is ever victorious. He is vanquished only when he forsakes truth and non-violence, and turns a deaf ear to the inner voice”⁸.

To the Indian Church

Now, the reading of John’s text in the light of Gandhiji’s live interpretation of it, offers us certain challenges and invites us to concrete response in liberating the Indian Church.

Here some of them are pointed out and the details left to reader’s reflection. First of all, just as in the Gospel-situation the Jews opposed the offer of freedom claiming their Abrahamic

4. See *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth* (Navajiven pub. Ahmedabad Reprinted 1958), p. XIII.

5. Ibid p. XIV.

6. *Young India*, 1921.

7. See *An Autobiography* (Introduction)

8. *The Science of Satyagraha*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1962) p. 67

lineage, so too, in the Church today, particularly in India, we face a 'fulfilment-complex' that claims to have full (objective) truth (One is too sure and proud of one's possession of truth).

Gandhiji's life reminds us that Jesus' offer of truth and freedom is a promise. His promise is fulfilled through his Spirit who leads us on to ever fuller truth till the Parousia. The Spirit did not give us the whole package of his influence at Pentecost. He continues to guide us into all the truth, as we search with hope.

Very aptly does Gandhiji's *My Experiments with Truth* remind us that we cannot possess the truth; it is the truth that takes possession of us. And so, our commitment to truth can never make us complacent or complex but urges us on to search for fuller and fuller truth while seeing the occasional glimpses of him who is yet to manifest His fullness.

We certainly call ourselves a pilgrim people, and we explain the eschatological nature of the Church as 'already' and 'not-yet'. But we do not seem to live as people who march and search. On the contrary, we seem to think that unchangeability is the sign of possessing truth; that orthodoxy means being fixed to something and sticking on; and so we are allergic to experiments in Christian life and worship. At best we tolerate them for a while as though they were meant for expert enthusiasts and immature Christians.

We say that the Truth is a person and that this Person is the Lord Jesus whose Spirit blows where it wills. At the same time we attempt to protect and safeguard this Person who escapes all our calculations. The real problem is that we find it unpleasant to be constantly challenged by this 'Person of truth' and so in the name of housing the truth we would like to settle down without disturbance. The Gospel call is to know the truth unceasingly, as Gandhiji experimented with it in order to be set free daily more. It is, of course, a painful task. Truth is a two-edged sword, and the freedom which it offers is costly.

Secondly, Jesus' promise of the Spirit to lead us into all the truth and freedom invites us to shed all fears. For "where

the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom", (2 Cor 3: 17) and where the Spirit of freedom is, there can be no fear. The Risen Lord himself told the disciples, not to be afraid" (Mt 28: 5; Mk 16: 6; Lk 24: 38). "For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you a slave and cause you to be afraid" (Rom 8: 15). Here again, Gandhiji comes to clarify our vision. According to him a coward cannot be a *satyagrahi*; one who fears cannot hold on to truth and fight.⁹

Tagore says,

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high,

Into that heaven of freedom, let my country awake!"¹⁰

But Church institutions in India seem to be haunted by fear-complexes. We are afraid to be an Indian Church, i. e. a humble and poor Church; and so we go begging in Europe and America to raise funds for building tall churches and huge seminaries in order to hide and cover our poor original selves from other communities. We are afraid to be lost like the leaven in the dough of the Indian people and so we defend certain Western traditions to differentiate ourselves from others as our Gospel contribution. We are afraid of losing vocations to priesthood and religious life and so we imprison people by traditional sanctions and outmoded practices. The result is that the sweet yoke of the Lord becomes a crushing beam. Again we are afraid to give up power and position in the community. We call upon authority to crush the charismatic movements. Besides there are fear-complexes which are operative unconsciously and so more harmful¹¹. Fear, thus, sucks out the vitality to face and accept ourselves as a Church in a developing India. To be brief, as long as we are afraid to be ourselves, i. e. an Indian Church, and as long as we are afraid to face ourselves with our inferiority complexes (bound to Western philosophies and theologies) we cannot be free to know the truth that sets us free.

9. Ibid. pp. 66.

10. *Gitanjali* - Song 35.

11. Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*, Nortons. N. Y. 1949) pp. 35.

Thirdly, the challenges of Jn 8: 36 for the mission of the church in India, should be drawn attention to. Today we feel deeply for the development of the people. We try to engage ourselves in social work, economic projects, agricultural aids etc. These involvements could make people free provided they enable men to become more and more themselves, i. e. persons¹². But, if the mission and service are merely directed to the relief of the poor without our person-to-person meeting, our enterprise could terminate in only marketing and banking. The Gospel truth is a person and the freedom of the Gospel can be offered only when we come in contact with the selfhood of the people who alone can respond to a personal call¹³.

Why, otherwise, in spite of so much social service, is the Gospel not operative? why do so many converts remain 'rice' Christians? Freely have we offered food and medicines. But we have not showed them the way to become free in the Spirit; to become themselves in Spirit and Truth as the Gospel promises. We have poured water over them abundantly, but we have not let the water spring from within their bosom (Jn 7: 39). Therefore the mission of development is, primarily, to create favourable conditions (material and spiritual) so that people are enabled to know the truth about themselves and thus realize the freedom of the true self (Jn 3: 7).

Next comes the mission of dialogue, so important in a country where religions mingle and merge in the daily lives of the people. In dialogue with religions, we should meet partners as equals, respecting their faith. We should be ready to learn from them. But if we seek after the Truth in dialogue, we must also witness to the provisions of our faith as well. True, we have to share our confession and creed, but what is more basic is our manifesting the freedom of the Spirit who guides. Better than doctrinal elucidations can the groan of the Spirit in us call our partner effectively to depth-encounter. God's spirit

12. See Rogers, C. *On Becoming a Person* (Massachusetts, 1961).

13. See. Martin Buber. *I and Thou* (T.T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1970) pp. 51...

joins itself to ours to declare that we are God's children (Rom 8: 16).

To wind up these observations on the relevance and significance of the John 8:36, considered in the Indian context, what can be suggested concretely? At least one thing: in a country whose motto is *Satyameva Jayate*, but where corruption prevails the Christian communities have the responsibility of not so much speaking about the truth as doing and living it (Jn 3: 21) so that whoever comes to know them may be set free from every kind of bondage to untruth. Truth and freedom are contagious.

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The Price He Paid

Why did they arrest Jesus and torture and murder him? Jesus who was meek and humble, who went about doing good to all? And why did Jesus let all this happen without planning a defence, without negotiating a compromise, without using 'prudence' and explaining himself to the satisfaction of the authorities?

One answer is that it happened according to the Scriptures, in fulfilment of prophecies, by "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (A 2: 23; Jn 19: 36; Mk 14: 49; Lk 22: 22; 24: 25-27; Mt 16: 21-23; 26: 24, 54). Jesus himself spoke about the charge he had received from his Father (Jn 10: 18; 14: 31; cf Jn 15: 10; Ph 2: 8; Hb 5: 8). Hence the sense in the early Church of the necessity of Christ's suffering (Lk 24: 26).

The question, where the Old Testament passages and prophecies speak of a suffering Messiah, or a suffering Son of Man,

need not be taken up here. Our concern is with the plan and command of the Father. Did God want and positively will [that Jesus should be put to death with such humiliation and violence? Was Jesus' murder God's own planning? There is a classical theology which answers this question in the affirmative. According to it, a painful and violent end for Jesus was necessitated by a conflict raging in God's own heart between his mercy and his justice. His mercy would gladly forgive men all their sins; his justice would have the full penalty paid by the sinner. To satisfy the claims of both mercy and justice God had to give his Son and deliver him up for torture and death, so that men might be spared and go free. This is a strange theory postulating a schizoid condition in God making for the saddest tragedy on earth. Here is a God torn within himself and tearing others; a God whose justice is a Shylock demanding his pound of flesh and knowing no mercy. The explanation is fatal not only to Jesus but to God himself. No wonder such a God died in due time and was disowned by men.

The death of Jesus is related indeed to God's will, but not in the manner that this fanciful theory suggests. The will of God is man's wholeness. What God seeks is our salvation in our acceptance of Jesus, and not our damnation in our rejection of him. God's justice consists in restoring us, and not in satisfying some need of his own. His justice is the Resurrection. In the living Jesus we are restored, and real human life is made possible. God loved the world so much as to give his only Son so that believers in him may not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3: 16). God's Son came to liberate men and make them free, to offer them forgiveness and life in abundance, and hope beyond death (Lk 4: 18; Gal 5: 1, 13; Jn 10: 10; 6: 40, 50-51). Jesus came indeed to do the will of him who sent him, but the will of him who sent him was not that Jesus should be murdered to meet some divine need but that Jesus should lose nothing of all that the Father has given him, to raise us up on the last day, and that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life (Jn 6: 38-40). The wholeness and well-being of human persons in community is the centre of God's concern as revealed in the Bible and in Jesus Christ.

But there are anti-human forces on earth, which are also, on that account, anti-God. The effort to be human and the attempt to help be human are sure to clash with these forces. Loyalty to man and God will involve a combat, and may entail the necessity of a struggle till death. Violence and tragedy are part of the concrete historical situation of man. They are a historical necessity, not a divine one. They are part of God's plan only to the extent to which they are unavoidable in the struggle for human wholeness which is what God wants and wills. They are taken over by the Son of God in his assumption of the human condition as part of the struggle for man's humanity. The Incarnation by itself implies and includes the acceptance of suffering and death, but that need not mean torture and murder. It would make a difference if Jesus just grew old and died, or succumbed to some disease, or whether he risked his life and gave it battling for the liberation and honour of man.

In Mt. 5, the highly fascinating ideal of creative human existence is presented not only as a gift of God but as a task for man involving struggle and suffering. It involves non-conformity with accepted life-styles, value-sets and goals. It calls for opposition to them. That is sure to bring persecution, and lead to mourning and hunger and thirst. But one should not yield or give up, but go on struggling with hope and joy, for the outcome is certain and full of blessing (Mt. 5: 3-12). The early Church, when she taught and wrote about these things had, we may suppose at the back of her mind, the memory of Jesus' own combat for human life, and the Resurrection: Liberation with which that battle was crowned.

'Exorcisms' are instances of God's struggle in Jesus against powers which were considered intractable and dangerous. His tackling them is also a call to man to shape his own greatness and freedom in partnership with God by resisting and overcoming every satanic power which holds man in bondage, and handicaps and humiliates him (Mt 8: 28-34). In cutting across traditional barriers of prejudice and pride in order to give recognition to the humanity of men and women Jesus came into sharp conflict with all who had other standards than his in relating to people. The Gospels point up the conflictual character of situations in which Jesus mixed in bad company to the chagrin of holy people,

and with shady characters, with the ritually defiled, with the fallen and the despised, with the outcasts of society (cf Mt. 9: 9-13; Mk 2: 13-17; Lk 7: 35-50; Jn 8: 1-11).

Bertold Brecht has written: "Whoever helps those who are lost is himself lost". Jesus wanted to help precisely 'the least, the lowliest and the lost'. Therefore he was rejected and crushed. He was lost. But God picked him up from the grave for he was too precious to be left to rot there. Had Jesus merely wanted a change, a mere transfer of power from one hand to another, rather than true and total humanity within the high and the low from the oppressor to the oppressed, he would have fought, destroyed, conquered and refused suffering (Mt 26: 53; Jn 18: 36). But since what God and Jesus wanted was human wholeness for persons in community, what mattered most was the insertion and revelation in our history, of a complete humanness. This is what Jesus accomplished through his struggle unto death in favour of man's greatness and possibilities. Today he may adopt today's means for the insertion of humanness into history. On the other hand he may choose to endure the pain of having to fight and demolish evil in order to liberate the captive masses.

Men have developed life-styles and structures - economic, political, religious and cultural - in which power, authority, influence, decisions, wealth, are all in the hands of the few while the vast masses of people are poor; powerless, hungry and humiliated. This goes counter to God's dreams of man and of the human community. God identifies himself with the people and subverts the disorder built up by all the Pharaohs of the world, ancient and modern. He pours out the coins of money-changers, and overturns their tables; he scatters the proud in their self-conceit, pulls down the powerful from their thrones and sends the rich empty away. He exalts the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. He brings good news to the poor, proclaims liberty to captives and sets the downtrodden free (Jn 2: 15; Mk 11: 15-19; Lk 1: 51-53; Exodus 3: 12-15).

Subversive actions could not go unchallenged and uncombated, even if it be God and his Christ that give them leadership. Chapter 4 of Luke is typical: God's programme of liberation of men (v. 18) immediately provokes hostility and rejection (v. 23),

ending up in a murderous attempt on the life of Jesus (v. 29). After the overturning of the tables in the Temple the chief priests and the scribes sought a way to destroy him (Mk 11: 18). On an earlier occasion, when Jesus had restored a maimed hand in the synagogue on a Sabbath day, 'the Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him' (Mk 3: 6; Mt 12: 14). The Sabbath activity of Jesus contained a rejection of the official understanding of the ancient observance, a criticism of religious authorities, and a liberation of men from religious fetters. "And this was why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did this (healing) on the sabbath.... This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God." (Jn 5: 16-18; cf. 11: 50-53)

The conflict was bitter and continuous. At every turn Jesus was met with sharp questioning. Take Mark 2, for instance, for the dense echo of the battle that raged:

"Why does this man speak thus? Who can forgive sins but God alone? (Mk 2: 7)

"Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (v. 16)

"Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" (v. 18)

"Why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" (v. 24), and later,

"Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? . . . Is not this the carpenter.. and are not his sisters here with us?" (Mk 6: 3)

Jesus was not unaware of the mounting hostility, or of attempts to precipitate him, unguarded, into a compromising fatal word, or of plots to kill him off. The period of his ministry filled with voices of enthusiastic crowds and with the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, was succeeded by a period when his following thinned off, and the sense grew of a gathering storm, and his own words became heavier and more solemn, even sombre (Jn 6: 66 f). It may be that it was because he sensed the assassin's dagger dogging his heels that he left Jewish territory for a while and went into hiding in the region of Tyre and Sidon and in the wild regions north of the lake of Galilee (Mk

7: 24, 31). When he returned to his native land he began to hint at approaching tragedy, and to warn his friends to brace themselves for severe trials in the cause of the kingdom and of man (Mk 8: 31-38; 10: 32-34; cf Jn 3: 3-14; Mt 15: 21; 12: 14).

It seems clear then that the death of Jesus was a historical necessity called for by the new and non-conformist path he chose to tread in obedience to the Father's plan to redeem mankind from every brokenness, humiliation and captivity. Part of Jesus' greatness consists in the fact that he stood for the greatness of man before God and within God's love and readily paid the price for the stand he took.

And the price was his life, so young and full of promise. Those who made little of men and of their dignity, freedom and possibilities, and much, perhaps, of riches and power and 'religion', took him and tortured and killed him when they found that he could not be manipulated or cajoled or threatened into conformity to their standards and values.

The struggle still continues. Jesus is still on the battlefield: in Calcutta and Delhi, in the huts of the Adivasis and the slums of Harijans, in the forgotten villages of India, in Colombia, Chile and Brazil, in Vietnam and Haarlem, in South Africa and Russia. He upholds the worth of human persons above banks, production systems, parliaments, and the politics of the clever few. His criticism, non-conformity and creative resistance continue and light fires in many hearts. The price is being paid today with the tortured students and hanged priests of Brazil, with the murder of Allende and the destruction of Chile's hope, with the captivity of Latin American countries, in the courage of Solzhenitsyn, with the Camillo Torreses whose blood fills the chalices they laid aside for a gun, by the jailed students of Chaibasa, Bihar, by the agony of Jaya Prakash Narayan and of radical youth over 560 million people left by the elite of the land in squalor and hunger and total neglect. Across Asia men have sought to serve the poor of God and ended up in jail, in Korea, in Vietnam, in the Philippines, in India.

A growing number of men and women, among them priests and sisters too, are beginning to do what the Epistle to the Hebrews invites us to: "Jesus suffered outside the gate... Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for

him" (Hb. 13: 11-13). A growing number of men and women are disowning and withdrawing from the existing socio-economic and political structures and from the life-styles shaped by them. They disown the competitive, consumerist culture of the day. They opt for more human ways, and pay the price of their protest, daring and dreams. They are ready to risk their life in a struggle for the human quality of existence. Their dedication merges with the commitment of Jesus, and so their life becomes a non-verbalized act of faith.

Jesus lives with and in these people. He is still in our midst as a subversive force and a disturber of the sheriff's peace. He loves men and wants them to live, and therefore he grapples with every form of death. He is the men and women who work for the liberation of the masses. People like him will be repudiated by politicians and priests: they will have to pay for their faith with their lives, as Gandhiji and Martin Luther King had to. Any church which follows him without glancing furtively to Right or Left, will participate with all its power in his mission of bringing the gospel to the poor and liberation to the imprisoned. The more she is thus involved in his mission, the deeper will she get caught up in his destiny, and become [a Church under the Cross. She will not worship the Cross as such but hold it up as a sign of elected poverty and protest, as a sign of the affirmation of man and his world, whom God loves. The Church of Jesus will be misunderstood, oppressed and persecuted. Note the significant promise of persecution in Mk 10: 30, a telling addition, wholly unexpected in the context. Suffering is a 'note', or mark, of the church, but it is suffering for the Kingdom, in Jesus' name, and for the people for whom he lived and gave his life. Jesus crucified and alive today is the criticism of Church and society from within.

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Samuel Rayan

The General Editor regrets that owing to an inadvertency the tables in Father Houtart's article on "Social and Religious Values among Catholic Youth in Kerala" in *Jeevadhara* 25, pp. 83-93 were incorrectly given, and apologizes to his subscribers for this. The following are the right tables:

Table 3 : B Opinion on the actual position of the Church as institution in the Kerala society

	Fishermen For Against	Rural Youth For Against	Workers For Against	Employees For Against	Students For Against
There is a betterment in the Church's attitude toward social injustice and the lot of the poor		M	M	M	
There is a betterment in the Church's attitude toward secular affairs and its way of integrating itself in the world		M	M		M
The Church is a factor of liberation in society					
The Church of Kerala is creatively present in the area of culture	D	M	M	M	M
The Wealth of the Church is one of the chief difficulties that the Catholics of Kerala meet with in living their religion	M	M		M	M

D = above 75%

M = between 50 and 69%

no sign = the percentages of acceptance and rejection of the proposition are inferior to 50%

Table 4 : Concrete action that the Church has to develop to fulfil its function

	<i>Fishermen For Against</i>	<i>Rural Youth For Against</i>	<i>Workers For Against</i>	<i>Employees For Against</i>	<i>Students For Against</i>
Teaching the sense of the human rights and the dignity of the individuals	D	D	D	D	M
By stirring a sense of the duty of sharing the struggle for the progress of the people	M	M	D	M	M
By setting up charitable work for the poor families	D	D	D	M	D
By setting up projects for agricultural and community development		M	D	M	M
By animating movements that could act on public opinion to awake conscience on the problems of the country	M	D	D	M	M
By developing Christian trade union	M	M	M		M
Through its colleges and schools	M	M			
By drawing up new syllabus for catechetical education		M			
By exercising influence on the elite	M	M			M

D = above 70%

M = between 50 and 69%

no sign = the percentages of acceptance and rejection of the proposition are inferior to 50%

Table 5 : Opinions and expectations about the bishops

<i>Opinion on religious authorities</i>	<i>Fishermen For Against</i>	<i>Rural Youth For Against</i>	<i>Workers For Against</i>	<i>Employees For Against</i>	<i>Students For Against</i>
The real catholic accepts all the directives of the Pope and the Bishops	D	M	D	M	M
Bishops are accessible to the faithful		M	D	D	M
Bishops are in touch with the problems of the people	M	M	D	D	M
<i>Expectation on what a Bishop will be</i>					
Administrator	M	M	M	M	M
Father in the spiritual sphere	D	D	M	D	D
Preacher by word and example of Christian doctrine and principles	D	D	D	D	D
Alert to problems and demands of present time, ability to renew and forge ahead	M	D	D	D	D
Ability to enter dialogue with priests and laity, leaving them certain initiatives in their work	M	D	D	D	D
Friend of the priests	D	D	D	D	D
Animator in social question	M	D	D	D	D
Animator in religious sphere	D	D	M	D	

M= between 50 and 69%

M= between 50 and 69%

no sign = the percentages of acceptance and rejection of the proposition are inferior to 50%

Table 6 : Opinions about the priest

	Fishermen For Against	Rural Youth For Against	Workers For Against	Employees For Against	Students For Against
There is a change for better in the <i>role</i> of the priest and religious during the last few years	M		D	D	M
There is a change for better with regard to their <i>way of living</i> .	M	M	D	D	M
Most of the priests are in good terms with religious groups.	M	M			
Priests have been cast in a European mould.		M	M	M	M
Most of the priests seek an easy life.	M	M	D	D	M
Priests suffer from certain complexes that hold them at a distance from the people.			M	M	
Indian priests are aware of the problems of India and are doing all they can to solve them.					M
Priests are accessible to the parishioners,	D	D	M	M	D

Priests are equally accessible to the poor and the rich	D	M	?	M
Priests are in touch with the problems of people	M		M	M
The clergy has a superiority complex and distrusts the laity		M	M	D
Priests from abroad make effort to help Indian catholics to take up their responsibilities	M		M	
Priests from abroad understand the problems of the country and contribute to development	M		M	
One of the chief difficulties that the Catholics of Kerala meet with is the authoritarian ways of the priests	M	M	D	M

D = above 70 %

M = between 50 and 69 %

no sign = the percentages of acceptance and rejection of the proposition are inferior to 50 %

Table 7 : Opinions concerning the layman and his position in the Church

	Fishermen		Rural Youth		Workers		Employees		Students	
	For	Against	For	Against	For	Against	For	Against	For	Against
<i>Expectations concerning his duties and behaviours</i>										
It is essential that										
He goes to Mass every Sunday and keeps the precepts of the Church	D		D		M		M		D	
He tries to live according to the precepts of Our Lord	D		D		D		D		D	
He accepts all the directions of the Pope and Bishops	D			M		D	M			M
He takes part in Catholic movements and associations	M		M			M				M
He shows the non-Christians that they are in error	M		M		M		M		M	
He adopts a critical attitude towards the Church		M		M		D	M			1
He actively promotes economic, social, political, cultural and religious development of all men	D		D		D		D		D	

He takes part in socio-economic development and denounces the obstacles to it

D

D

D

D

D

One can be a really good christian with-out belonging to any Church

M

M

D

M

M

As a christian no one owes allegiance to one political party or another

M

M

M

M

M

A good catholic can be a socialist

D

D

D

D

D

A catholic may collaborate with marxists in political parties

M

M

D = above 70%

M = between 50 and 69%

no sign = the percentages of acceptance and rejection of the proposition are inferior to 50%

Table 8 : Personal and social behaviours and catholic morals

	<i>Fishermen For Against</i>	<i>Rural Youth For Against</i>	<i>Workers For Against</i>	<i>Employees For Against</i>	<i>Students For Against</i>
The Catholic moral law has an answer for every problem of life	M	M			M
Private property is a principle that Catholics have to defend	M	M			M
Family planning goes against Catholic morals	M	M	M	M	M
Marriage is the consecration of a complete communion of life	D	D	D	D	D
Young people should be free to choose their marriage partner	D	D	D	D	D
The sexual morals of the Church is one of the chief difficulties that Catholics meet in living their religion	M		M	M	M
The Church teaching on sexual morality is the best guarantee for human fulfilment	M	M			M
A social uprising goes against Catholic morals		M	D	M	M

D = above 70%

M = between 50 and 69%

no sign = the percentages of acceptance and rejection of the proposition are inferior to 50%

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